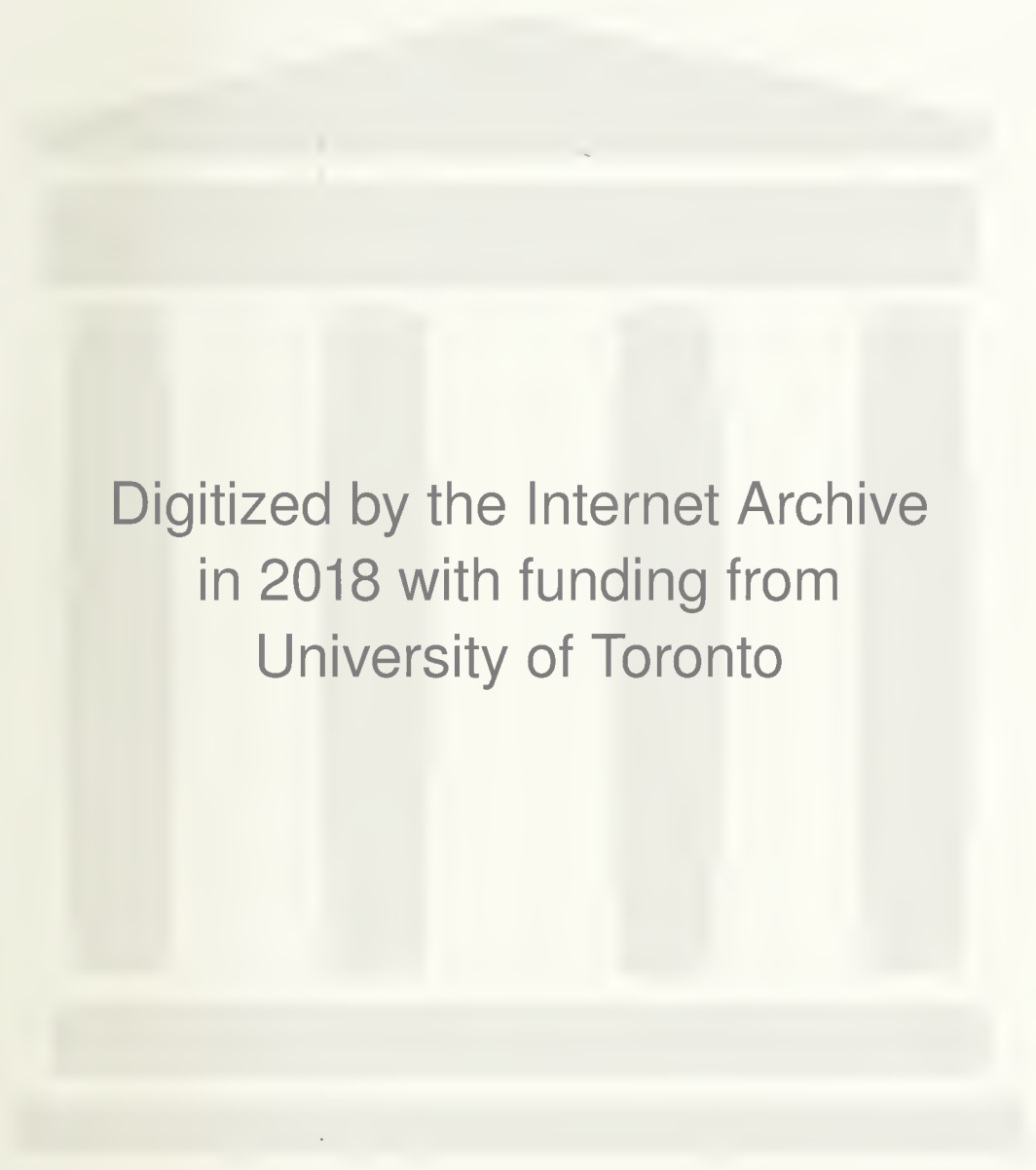


The cover features intricate black decorative swirls and flourishes. A central circular motif, resembling a sun or moon, is surrounded by smaller swirls. The title and author's name are printed in a gold-colored serif font.

The Ne'er
do weel.

ANNIE S. SWAN.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2018 with funding from
University of Toronto

<https://archive.org/details/neredowell00swan>



Frontispiece.

“‘OH! DON, FORGIVE ME,’ SHE SAID.”

[Page 320.]

THE NE'ER-DO-WHEEL.

BY

ANNIE S. SWAN

(Mrs. Burnett-Smith),

AUTHOR OF "KINSFOLK," "A BITTER DEBT," "A VICTORY WON," "ELIZABETH
GLEN," "HOMESPUN," "A STORMY VOYAGER," ETC.

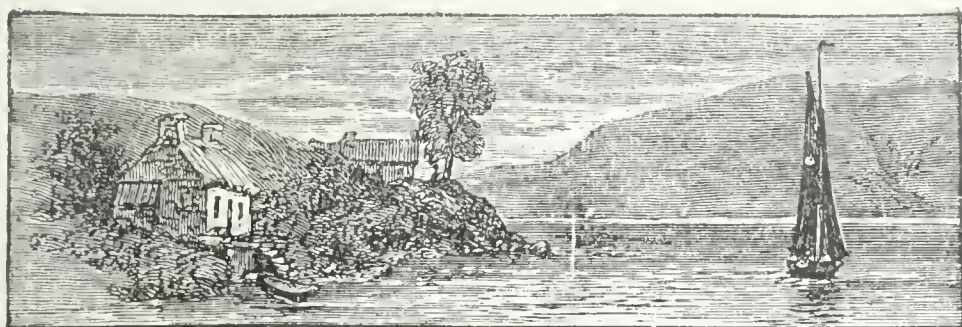
TORONTO, CANADA

WILLIAM BRIGGS

LONDON

HUTCHINSON & CO.

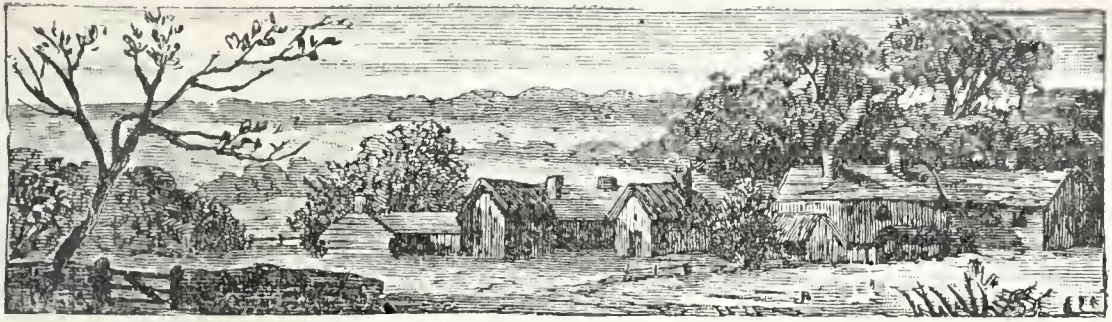
ENTERED according to Act of the Parliament of Canada, in the year one thousand
eight hundred and ninety-seven, by WILLIAM BRIGGS, at the Department of
Agriculture.



CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. IN REVOLT	I
II. A COLD WELCOME	10
III. OUT OF TUNE	18
IV. A BITTER PARTING	27
V. THE FINAL STEP	35
VI. OUTWARD BOUND	44
VII. THE NEW HOME	52
VIII. BOUND	60
IX. AFTER THREE YEARS	71
X. A CREATURE OF MOODS	79
XI. SERVANT OR SON?	87
XII. ON A BORDER RAID	95
XIII. WHAT CAME OF IT	104
XIV. PUT TO THE TEST	111
XV. "TILL DEATH US DO PART"	118
XVI. CHISHOLME OF RUGLAS	126
XVII. UNFORGOTTEN, WELL-BELOVED	135

CHAP.	PAGE
XVIII. FROM OUT THE PAST	142
XIX. FOUND OUT	149
XX. TOO LATE	156
XXI. ALL OVER	165
XXII. ONCE MORE	172
XXIII. THE EXILE'S RETURN	180
XXIV. THE EXILE'S TALE	188
XXV. IN QUIET WATERS	198
XXVI. MEMBER FOR THE GLENS	205
XXVII. THE DEAD PAST	213
XXVIII. FELLOW-PASSENGERS	220
XXIX. HOMEWARD BOUND	228
XXX. AT LAST	235
XXXI. HUSBAND AND WIFE	242
XXXII. A TROUBLED MIND	250
XXXIII. HER NEW ESTATE	258
XXXIV. HOPES AND FEARS	266
XXXV. IN THE BACKGROUND	273
XXXVI. FROM THE GLEN	281
XXXVII. RODDIE IN DANGER	289
XXXVIII. A THUNDERBOLT	296
XXXIX. WHAT TO DO ?	304
XL. COMING TO A CRISIS	310
XLI. DESPAIR	319
XLII. A FRIEND IN NEED	330
XLIII. IN THE LIGHT	339



THE NE'ER-DO-WEEL.

CHAPTER I.

IN REVOLT.



ABOUT four o'clock on a winter afternoon a young lad was pushing his way on foot along the wild and lonely road which led him across moorland and hill, and finally gave entrance to a remote and solitary High'land glen. It was a fine, clear, bracing day ; the sun had set redly behind its bank of frosty clouds ; but daylight tarries long in such northern latitudes, where no smoke save the peat-reek of a shepherd's sheiling ever seeks to obscure it. The road was hard bound with a crisp frost, and gave clean and pleasant footing, which was well, because the boy had tramped twelve miles, and four still lay between him and his destination.

He was a tall, well-built, fine-looking fellow, sinewy and strong, and with a dark, handsome face of the true Highland type. There was a good deal of character in the set of his massive jaw, and his mouth was

marked more by strength than weakness, although in his softer moments it was not without its mobile and tender curve. His eyes were grey and fearless, and on his cheek there was the flush of perfect health. He walked with a long, swinging gait, whistling as he went, and looking from side to side, seeming to note with interest and even with love each familiar landmark. As he entered the mouth of the Glen the character of the scenery somewhat suddenly changed. He had walked for the last five miles in a comparatively open country, across great stretches of moorland, where the wild birds were at home, and which the red deer did not disdain to haunt. But suddenly the mountains rose up on either side, dark and mighty and solemn ; their snow-capped peaks standing out sharply against the amber clearness of the sky. The brawling mountain streams whose every pool and eddy were to Donald Orde familiar and well-beloved, awoke sounding echoes through these solitudes. The road followed its windings, and slowly made the ascent of the Glen, until it came to the hamlet of Garrows.

A handful of cottar houses with their little crofts adjoining clustered on the left bank of Garrows Loch ; beyond that the Glen became more richly wooded, and set deep in the fastnesses of its pine forests stood the old mansion-house of Garrows, towards which the boy was pressing, though well he knew that no particular welcome waited him there. When he was about a mile from the hamlet he saw a dark object on the white road, which, although the twilight was rapidly closing in, his sharp eyes told him was a horse and trap. It was easy for him to surmise whose trap it was, even before he came within measurable distance of the sturdy white cob which Dr. MacAlister had

driven in and out the Glen for ten years and more. A certain mischievous twinkle came in the lad's grey eyes as he saw the doctor sit up suddenly at sight of him, rubbing his eyes to make sure that he had made no mistake. Then he saw him speak a few words to his man, and shake his head. He was still shaking his head when Donald came abreast of the gig.

"Hulloa," cried the doctor, "what in the name of all that's wonderful are you doing here, you young rascal?"

The doctor was an elderly man with a ruddy, pleasant face and iron-grey hair. He had spent his lifetime in these remote regions, doing good in season and out of season, sparing himself not at all, but equally at the call of rich and poor. Many a hard day's work, many a fight with the blinding drift, many a solitary night drive had fallen to the lot of Dr. MacAlister, and these were cheerfully undertaken, though he knew right well that in silver and gold his reward would be small. But his name was a household word in that great and wide parish, and he was remembered in many a heartfelt prayer.

"I'm glad I've met you, Doctor," said Donald Orde, in a matter-of-fact voice. "I've run away."

"I thought as much; and what for, may I ask, have you run away?"

"Couldn't stand it any longer," said the boy with a grimace. "It's not a school; it's a prison. Ask Roddie, and he'll tell you we stood it, sir, as long as we could."

"You don't mean to say that you have incited and led on my callant to open rebellion?" exclaimed the doctor, knitting his brows.

"I didn't incite him, and he led on himself,"

answered Donald with a nod. "Roddie knows what's what as well as I do, Dr. MacAlister, and we came to the conclusion that we owed it to ourselves to run away."

"Imphm!" said the doctor, and there was a good deal of meaning in that monosyllable. "Things have come to a bonnie pass when two imps like you and Roddie take the law into your own hands. Back he shall go before he's four-and-twenty hours older. I've a good mind to take you to Garrows myself and tell your uncle, or drive you to the Brig now, and pack you off with Roddie to Perth in the morning."

"It's easier said than done, Doctor," said Donald Orde quietly. "I've left the beastly place for good, and it would take something more than that to get me back again."

"Your uncle will be furious," said the doctor. "Do you think for a moment that he'll allow you to take the law into your own hands like this?"

"I'm seventeen," said the lad proudly, "and I've a right to have some say in things now. I'm quite willing to work. I'd drive a pair on the land or be a shepherd on the braes of Garrows rather than go back to school, and I'll tell my uncle that too."

"Well, he's not in a very good mood to-day, lad, I tell ye that," said the doctor warningly. "I've just come from Garrows."

"Oh, who's ill? Not Fiona, I hope."

"No, she's all right. It's your aunt; she has got a bad cold, and she'll need to take care of herself in this snell weather. Eh, but ye are like your father, Donald Orde. I hope ye are not to follow in his footsteps, and leave as ill a name in the Glen as he did."

"I will not leave an ill name in the Glen," cried the lad indignantly. "I will go away from it first, far across the seas ; that's what I've in my mind. Anyhow, I'll never get on at Garrows with Uncle Hector, and I don't think it's any use beginning to try."

"Wheest, lad, if ye but try and be biddable, and remember what's due to your elders, ye'll get on well enough, but I doubt ye are beginning the wrong way."

"Well, if he wants me to go back to school, Doctor, I can't do it, and I won't ; not for all the Macleans in the world."

"It's a proud spirit and a determined," said the doctor musingly. "Well, well, you must fight your own battle, lad, but be not too hasty. Remember it is easier to throw away bite and sup than to pick it up again, and your uncle is not a man to thrash wi'. Now I must away down to take my rebel in hand. If he gets there before me he'll have his mother wound round his little finger. But back he goes the morn if I be a living man. Take you my advice, Donald, and go back with him. Finish your schooling decently, and then set out on your life-work whatever it may be." He leaned from the gig, and taking the lad's hand in his, gave it a warm, close grip, and his kind eyes were full of earnest feeling as he looked upon Donald's honest, winsome face. For indeed he loved the lad well, in spite of his many faults, and his heart warmed to him as it did to very few. A something came into the minds of both, a certain conviction that they should not meet for a long time ; and the doctor was often glad afterwards that his last words to the lad had been kind and sympathetic, and not full of rebuke.

It was almost dark when they parted, and the lad strode on to the village, guided thither by the red light which played about the open door of Shan M'Dougall, the smith. When the lad put his head round the door and called the smith by his name, that worthy started as if he had been shot, and looked round somewhat fearfully.

"It's me, Shan," called out Donald cheerfully. "I'm not a wraith or a warlock. I've run away from school at Perth, and I'm not going back if I live a hundred years."

"And what will the Laird be saying to that, Donald?" asked the smith, folding his brawny arms across his chest, and regarding the lad with a mixture of doubt and affectionate welcome.

"Faith, and I don't know what he'll say. The doctor thinks he'll cut my head off, and no less. But I'm no carin'. I'm too old to be treated like a bairn, and I couldn't stand it any longer."

"Perhaps he will let you bide at Garrows, and go out and in among us. There's a power of ways ye could be helping the Laird now, I'm thinking."

"I think so, too. Let's hope he'll agree with us, Shan. Now I must be off. I'll see you in the morning, unless they tie my legs like they do the calves, and drive me down in a cart to Dalnaspidal."

So saying, with a laugh which had a certain ring of uneasiness in it, the lad took himself off from the smithy door, and swung up the hill to the great gates of Garrows. The entrance to the place was the most imposing part of it. It was an iron gateway, built with massive stone buttresses surmounted by enormous dragons, which had a weird, fearsome look in the shadowy evening light. There was a

handsome and substantial lodge at the entrance, but Donald knew well the secret fastening of the smaller gate, and slipped through quietly without disturbing Mary Finlayson, the gate-keeper, or her granddaughter, Ailie. It was very dark in the avenue; great fir trees met overhead, their branches so closely intertwined that there was not even space for the smallest moonbeam to penetrate. But the boy knew every foot of the way, and pursued it fearlessly, until he came to the open space before the door. It was a high and melancholy-looking house, weather-beaten by the storms of many a winter; a great rambling desert of a place, which wanted a family of rollicking boys and girls to fill it with light and noise and happy laughter. The windows were mostly darkened, and the hall lamp sent out through the fanlight above the door a pale shaft of light which but partially illumined the great gloomy pillared doorway.

Here the boy hesitated for a moment for the first time; and the full meaning and possible consequences of his act were flashed upon him suddenly. The place was in no sense a home to him. He had never been made welcome in it, even when he had striven his hardest to please those who dwelt within it. What could he expect now when he had deliberately taken authority into his own hands, and was about to claim some voice in the ordering of his life? The thought for a moment banished the brightness from his face, and even robbed it of its youth; but he was no coward, and after that hesitation, which was but momentary, he turned the handle of the inner door and walked in.

It was a bare hall, with a tessellated floor and some

meagre furnishings of brown oak. There was a fireplace which ought to have been all ablaze with logs, but it was dark and cold, and the solitary lamp on the centre table threw weird shadows on the floor and on the walls, which were hung with various trophies of the chase.

The old butler, half asleep in his little room, came shuffling out at the unwonted opening of the door, and at sight of the young Laird, as they called him among themselves, he threw up his hands.

"Mercy upon us, Master Donald. Where have you come from?"

"From school, of course, Farquharson. Where's the Laird, and my aunt, and Miss Fiona?"

At that moment there was a bounding step on the stair, and suddenly the sun seemed to shine in that desolate place. A young girl in a short girlish dress, her dark hair clustering round her sweet face and defying all attempts at prim decorum, bounded off the last three steps and threw herself into Donald Orde's arms.

"Oh, Don," she cried, with her sweet red lips at his ear, "have you really done it? Have you run away?"

"Of course I have; I said I would, and I have. Here, don't hang on to me like that," he added, ashamed before the serving-man, although secretly glorying in Fiona's joy at sight of him.

But presently the old man shuffled back to his oak settle, and the two young creatures, for whom destiny held so much joy and anguish, looked at each other a moment in silence.

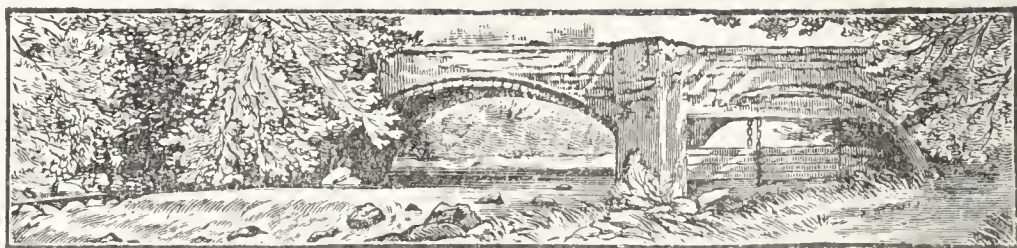
"You have grown, Fiona," said Donald, with a sigh at last, "You'll soon be a woman,"

"But don't you like me to be a woman, Don? You see, if you grow up to be a man and I stopped a little girl I couldn't be your chum any longer."

"I don't know that," said Donald. "I only know that I hate you to grow up so quick."

"Do you?" she asked, with a pathetic droop of her sweet lips. Then suddenly her expression changed. "Oh, Don, here's Uncle Maclean. Now, what'll you do?"

Donald did not speak, but, with a quick gesture, drew back from Fiona's side, and held himself erect, like a young oak before the blast.



CHAPTER II.

A COLD WELCOME.



SITTING over his newspaper in the dining-room, the Laird had become drowsily conscious of an unusual sound of voices in the hall, and had roused himself to come and discover its meaning. He was an old man, of a tall, spare, sinewy figure, suggestive of great strength and power of endurance. His face was long and thin ; the high cheeks sharply outlined, but ruddy of hue. A pair of keen, piercing black eyes looked out from under shaggy brows, which were grey, like the thin beard which straggled under his chin. He had a great shock of iron-grey hair on his head which gave him a somewhat fierce appearance. Indeed, Maclean of Garrows was no soft weakling, and was held more in fear than love in the Glen. He was a man of unblemished character, but hard as the nether millstone, without sympathy or tenderness for the young creatures who craved that brightness and freedom of existence which is only their rightful due. No children had been born to Maclean of Garrows, which was a bitter disappointment to him and his wife, although they were too proud to own it ; but it had

fallen to them to fill the place of father and mother to Donald Orde—a son of Maclean's cousin—and also to Fiona Forbes, who was niece to Mrs. Maclean—her own sister's child. They did their duty to them, not withholding the necessities and some of the comforts of life, but their childhood had been sad, and but for the sweet companionship they gave to each other would have been sadder still. When the old Laird stepped out of the dining-room and beheld the lad standing, his jaw fell, and his face became dark as Craighban under a storm.

“What are ye doing here, my lad?” he asked in a harsh, discordant voice. “This is not vacation time. What do you want?”

“I have run away, uncle,” answered the lad boldly. “I couldn't stay any longer; it would have killed me. I have had schooling enough. They can't teach me any more down there in Perth, and it's like the gaol. Do let me stop at home and help you in Garrows. I'll work with my hands at anything you like, but go back to that place I will not. I hate it.”

He clenched his strong young right hand and his grey eyes flashed as he spoke.

Fiona stood by looking upon him with a kind of fearful admiration, and wondering what would happen next.

Maclean made his big strong mouth long and thin, and he also clenched the hand which hung by his side. There had ever been antagonism between him and the boy, ever since the first day of his coming to the old house of Garrows. There was another and a more potent reason which made him regard his cousin's son with disfavour.

In the long ago time Hector Maclean and Donald

Orde's father had been rivals in love, and though Orde had won the prize fairly, Maclean had never forgiven him, especially as he had married the girl only to break her heart. Maclean had married himself speedily, out of sheer spite, a woman whom he neither loved nor understood, and their married life had been the natural out-come of that fatal mistake. All these things had, of course, helped to sour the naturally unlovable disposition, and Hector Maclean in his old age was an object to be pitied.

"And so ye will not go back, will ye not?" he asked, with a harsh sneer. "And who, think ye, is going to take the law from a young whelp like you?" The tone was more cutting than the words, and Donald winced under it.

"Don't speak like that, Uncle Hector," he said entreatingly. "If you only knew what like it is down there—how miserable, and mean, and unjust the whole life is, you would understand."

"That's a way young folks have of speaking of what is only right and wholesome discipline," said the old man sourly. "I well know that your father's son couldn't be expected to have any respect for law and order. And what did ye think to gain by coming off on this wild goose chase? Ye might have thought—if ye ever did think—that it's back you would go the morn."

The boy answered nothing; but all the softness died out of his face, and it became sullen and stern.

"Go to your governess, Fiona," said the Laird, with a stern glance at the girl, whose face betrayed a sympathetic interest, "I have a word to say to Donald which is not for misses' ears."

Fiona obeyed at once. She was terrified at her

uncle ; but she made bold, as she stole away, to touch Donald's hand with a little pitying and meaning caress, which conveyed to him all the sympathy of her heart. If Maclean noticed this he made no sign.

"Now listen to me, Donald Orde," said the Laird, looking the boy straight in the face. "Ye have forgotten evidently that ye are a pauper on my bounty. I am not a rich man, and do you think I've got money to cast to the winds like this? Your fees are paid up till midsummer, and up to midsummer ye bide whatever the consequences, and after that I see to it that ye get plenty of work to keep down your rebellious spirit. I've made arrangement with Mr. Grahame that ye go to Edinburgh and learn the lawyer's business with him ; maybe that will tame ye."

"Send me to Edinburgh to sit on an office stool !" cried the boy rebelliously. "Oh, Uncle Hector, you might as well kill me and be done with it—better indeed, for if I were dead I would not be hungering after the Glen as I have hungered down in Perth."

Now Maclean loved his own Glen and his own home with a passionate and deep love, and he was inwardly touched, being not altogether devoid of human feeling, by this tribute to it. But it had been so long his habit to crush down every softer attribute of his character that it passed in a moment.

"Ye are young, and there is wild blood in your veins, Donald," he said sternly. "There is nothing but wholesome discipline and hard work that will keep it down, so back to Perth you go to-morrow, and ye will need to eat humble pie to your master for the disgrace you have brought on the school and on me."

"Roddie MacAlister came with me, Uncle Hector," said the boy, with a sudden twinkle in his eye. "And I met Dr. MacAlister on the road just outside Garrows, and although he says he'll send him back, I don't believe he will."

"It's you that's put the ill into Roderick's head, Donald, for he was a good lad till you and he got so thick; and I can't think that the doctor will be soft enough to let him bide to his own undoing."

"You will see," said Donald confidently. "Roddie and me have sworn we won't go back, and we won't."

"We'll see," said the Laird significantly. "What ye both want is a good taste of the rope's end. I have been too soft with you, and I'm suffering for it this day."

Donald answered nothing, although many scathing words burned upon his lips.

"I will see what your aunt has to say about this mad folly of yours. Ye can go to the kitchen and see if they'll give you a bowl of porridge, although ye ill deserve it. A toom stomach and a plank bed might bring ye to your senses quicker than onything." With that he turned away, and ascending the stairs he entered without knocking a small sitting-room, where his wife spent most of her time when she was able to leave her own bedroom. That indeed was not often in the long, dark days of winter, when the wind moaned round the old house of Garrows, and sent cold gusts along its eerie passages and up its winding stairs.

It was a quaint, octagon-shaped room, directly above the library, with a window which commanded

the entire sweep of the Glen. A lovely window, whose prospect might have satisfied even eyes the most exacting, but Grace Maclean had never felt at home in Garrows, nor had she, after five-and-twenty years' experience of it, any love for the place.

She was a small, shrewish person, very dainty and fastidious in her ways, naturally conventional and old-maidish in her views of housekeeping and deportment. The isolation and desperate loneliness of her life had crushed out of her all the generous impulses and wider views to which she had not been a stranger in her girlhood. Her whole interest and affection were now centred in herself. Her ailments were her chief concern, and she was a sore dispensation to Dr. MacAlister, who had been driven to tell her more than once that if she had been a poor woman she would have been both happier and stronger.

She looked round at her husband's entrance languidly, but there was neither pleasure nor welcome written on her sallow face; yet it was so seldom that he voluntarily sought her, that she might well have exhibited some surprise at his unwonted visit.

"The lad's run away from the school, Grace, and walked every foot of the road from over the hills at Dalnaspidal," he said abruptly.

"And what made him do that daft-like thing?" she asked in a thin, querulous voice. "He might have thought he would just have to tramp it back the morn again."

"That's just what I said to him, Grace, but he has led Roderick MacAlister away with him. Do you think there can be any truth in what they say? They seem to think it a very ill place."

"All laddies think it an ill place where they are made to do as they are bid, Maclean. If ye give in to him now, you'll rue it all your days."

Maclean had never affected any great love for the boy, but his wife positively disliked him. There was a sore jealousy in her poor and bitter heart, because she fancied that sometimes Maclean regarded him with a yearning kindliness because he was the child of the woman he had loved.

Donald Orde was a little afraid of his uncle at times, but there were moments when he felt that if he could only penetrate the wall of stern reserve which stood between them he might have loved him; but towards his aunt he felt differently. She froze his young heart into silence, repressing him always and everywhere. It had indeed ever been a day of jubilee to these two desolate young creatures when their aunt Grace was too ill to come downstairs.

"I would like to be just, Grace," said the Laird. "And though I will undoubtedly send the lad back the morn, I will take some pains to find out what it's all about. What are we to do with him when he leaves Perth?"

"I thought you had settled that all, and that he was to go at midsummer to Mr. Grahame's office in Edinburgh," she said coldly. "If you bring him home here he'll ride rough-shod over you. There can't be two Lairds in Garrows, Maclean, and it would be nothing but perpetual strife."

"But the lad will be Laird some day, Grace. I couldn't put the place past him, even if I wanted to. And I'm sure there's a fine, high spirit in him, and he would do credit to the place."

"And so after you and me are gone there'll be no

Maclean in Garrows, but an Orde," she said significantly. "Do you like the thought?"

"No, Grace, but it will not be," he answered, his pride touched to the quick. "If he is to have the place he must take the name. Donald Orde Maclean would not sound that ill, would it?"

She made no answer, for her heart was sore and bitter within her because she had no son of her own to bear his father's name and succeed to his heritage.

"Would you like to see him, Grace?" asked Maclean presently. "He is an impudent whelp, and there's a lot o' the de'il in him, but there's something about him I like, and I can't help it. If we'd had a son like him we would have been happier and kinder, man and wife, than we are this day."

"Don't taunt me, Maclean," she cried, her voice shrill with pain, and she threw up her thin arms passionately. "It is not my wyte that there's not a bairn in Garrows, and I will not have my shame cast in my teeth."

"Hold your peace, woman," said Garrows, dismayed and distressed at her anger. "Who's casting shame at you? It's the Almighty's doing, and we must just submit. We must just be doing what we can for ither folks' bairns. Ye have seen how very sib Donald and Fiona are? It would please me well to think of them as man and wife in Garrows after we are gone."

But she made him no answer, only rocked herself to and fro in her chair, with her face hidden in her poor thin hands. He regarded her a moment in silence, then, with the shadow deepening on his face turned and left the room.



CHAPTER III.

OUT OF TUNE.



THE warmth of the greeting bestowed upon Donald Orde in the kitchen somewhat atoned for the coldness of his welcome upstairs.

He had that fine, frank, open-hearted manner towards dependants which is sure to win their respect and affection. There was not a man, woman, or child in Garrows who would not have run with speed to serve the young Laird.

The cook took good care that he should have a substantial meal instead of the porridge which his uncle had bidden him get. Though Mistress Maclean was considered niggardly in her housekeeping, there were certain things under the cook's control, and there was no lack of wholesome food in the house both for man and beast.

When he had enjoyed and finished his hearty meal, Donald took himself upstairs again to look for Fiona. There was a great drawing-room in the old house, hung with gloomy but valuable tapestry, and furnished after the quaint and not ungraceful fashion of a bygone day. It was a room which

might have been made both cosy and beautiful, but it required great fires to light and to warm it, and it was seldom indeed that there was any comfort to be found within it. Fiona, however, had an odd fancy for the room, and was often to be found there, curled up with a book in one of the old-fashioned chairs, or on the deep window-seat. Donald looked into the drawing-room first, but it was dark and cold—the shutters closed, and the curtains drawn heavily across the windows. Then he went up another winding stairway, and came to the little school-room where Fiona and he had been wont to play and share their lessons before it was decreed that he should go to Perth to school.

It was a warm and comfortable place, if somewhat bare in its furnishings. He was glad to find Fiona there alone, sitting in a battered old rocking-chair, with her feet on the fender and a book on her knee.

"Where's Miss MacEwan?" asked Donald, astonished and relieved to find his chum alone.

"She's gone down to the post-office, Don," answered Fiona joyfully. "Come and sit down and let's have such a nice talk."

Donald not unwillingly walked across the floor and threw himself on the rug beside Fiona's chair. She looked down at him with all the love of her heart in her eyes, for Donald Orde was the whole world to Fiona. She thought of him by day, and dreamed of him by night, and lived for the day when he should come back to Garrows never to go away again. She did not trouble herself at all about the complications which might arise in their future relations to each other. In some things she

was womanly and beyond her years, in others a mere child.

"Have you seen Uncle Hector again, Don, and has he said any more?" she asked eagerly.

Don shook his head. "No, I haven't seen him. I have been in the kitchen having a good tuck in," he answered. "But I'm afraid it's all up with me."

"Have you seen Aunt Grace yet?" she asked then, with slightly shadowing face.

He shook his head, and his face became grave and sad. "No, and I don't want to," he answered. "Even if Uncle Hector wanted to let me stop, I believe she'd egg him on to send me away. She hates me, Fiona."

Fiona sighed. She knew very well that though Donald might use exaggerated terms in speaking of his aunt, it was quite true that she disliked him. Indeed, she had never taken the trouble to hide it even from Fiona.

"Perhaps it will be better when you are a man," she said hesitatingly. "Then Aunt Grace will not want to scold you all the time. You will be a man very soon, Don. You are so big and tall, nearly as big as Uncle Hector."

She stooped from her chair, and laid her white slender hand a moment on his dark head. That gentle touch, which he had often felt before, somehow thrilled the lad through and through, and a flush rose to his high white brow.

"I only wish I were a man, Fiona," he said quickly. "I know what I'd do then."

"Tell me what you would do, Don. I love to hear you speaking about the future, because I think

there is nothing in the world you can't do if you set your mind to it."

"Well, the first thing I'll do when I'm a man and have plenty of money will be to take you away from Garrows."

"Oh, that would be fine," said Fiona, with sparkling eyes. "Perhaps we might go on a tour to Italy and France and all those beautiful countries Miss MacEwan tells me about. But perhaps when you are a man, Don, you won't like me as you do now, but want to take somebody else."

"That's likely," he said in high scorn. "It's much more likely you'll want to marry some fellow like Hamish Chisholme, and go to live at Ruglas. Beastly place, Ruglas. Might as well be banished to the wilds of Siberia at once."

"You are a silly to talk like that, Donald Orde," said Fiona, with a certain dignity which sat well on her. "But we needn't be bothering our heads about that. What we've got to think of just now is whether you are to be sent back to Perth to-morrow. I think I'll go down and beg Uncle Hector to let you stay."

"No you won't," said Donald, and the proud Highland blood flushed his cheek. "I've asked him myself, begged him almost, and he wouldn't; and I'm not going to have a girl begging and praying for me. There are some things a fellow can't stand, and that's one."

"But what will you do, then?" she asked perplexedly. "Just go back again to-morrow to school, and stop there till the vacation?"

"Not if I know it," said Donald darkly. "Wait, and you'll see."

The meaning of this dark saying could not be inquired into at that moment, for her governess entered, and presently the maid followed with the schoolroom tea.

Miss MacEwan was a very capable and efficient teacher, and she had been chosen by Mrs. Maclean because of her solid qualities, and her reputation as a good disciplinarian. She had found Fiona, however, such a docile pupil, that her skill as a disciplinarian had seldom been called into action. She was a good woman and kind-hearted, but dull and uninteresting, not a companion likely to draw out all that was best in a pupil. Fiona and she were good friends, but there was little sympathy or communion between them, and Fiona lived her own life, dreaming lovely and impossible dreams of the future, dreams in which Donald Orde was ever the central figure. He was, indeed, although he did not know it, her hero and her king.

The boy saw his uncle for a few minutes later in the evening, when he went into the dining-room to bid him good-night. Now if Maclean of Garrows thawed at any part of the day, it was after his dinner, when he sat down with his pipe and paper, and a stiff glass of toddy on the table at his side. He looked round, not ill-pleased, when the boy entered, and bade him come in and sit down.

"I'm just going to my bed, uncle," said Donald. "I'm tired. It's a long stiff walk from Dalnaspidal."

"Ye are cheap o' it," said the Laird grimly. "It was a daft-like walk. Well, I've ordered Rory to take ye down in the gig to-morrow afternoon to catch the four o'clock train, and he is to call in at the doctor's to see if Roddie be ready to go, and I have written a

letter to Mr. Thomson, your master, which you will deliver to him with your own hand.

The boy's face paled slightly, but his uncle was not watching him closely. He had not taken the matter seriously at all, but regarded Donald's flight merely as a boyish escapade, which must be promptly dealt with.

"What do you say to that, lad?" he asked after a moment, becoming conscious of the boy's unusual silence.

"Just what I said before, Uncle Hector. I'm not going back," he answered in a low voice, but determinedly.

"We'll see who's the master, my man, the morn," observed the Laird drily. "Ye are a fool, Donald Orde, to set yourself against me in such a fashion. You will gain nothing by it, but lose a lot. Have you been to pay your respects to your aunt yet?"

"No," answered the boy. "I didn't think she wanted to see me."

"She doesn't, and that's a fact," answered the Laird, with a mirthless laugh. "You haven't been able to get the right side of your aunt Grace, Donald; she likes Fiona far better than you."

"I don't care," answered the lad quickly. "I'm very glad she likes Fiona, because, you see, she has to be in the house all day, and it would be harder on her than me."

The shrewd frankness of this remark caused a smile to appear on the Laird's lips. It rather amused him to draw out the boy occasionally, and he was sometimes surprised at the quickness of his perception and the correctness of his judgment. Maclean, indeed, hoped great things of Donald Orde when he should

get past the rebellious stage and settle down to sober manhood.

"Well, you can go to your bed, lad, and perhaps ye'll be of a different mind in the morning. One thing you can be sure of is that I'll be of the same mind, and that Rory will be round with the gig at the back of two o'clock, and I will see ye into it myself. So good-night to ye; I wish ye a sound sleep and a sensible wakening."

"Good-night, uncle," said the boy, and held out his hand, which was a rather unusual proceeding in that undemonstrative and not particularly courteous household.

"I'm sorry if I vex you because I will not go back to school. I'm grateful for all you have done for me——"

"But what's the meaning of all this kind of talk?" interrupted his uncle hastily. "Away to your bed, and think no more about it, and see and be ready for Rory at two o'clock."

Any confidence which Donald might for the moment have been tempted to bestow was thus discouraged. He turned upon his heel and went off up to his own room.

It was only half-past nine, but he was tired and sleepy with his long tramp through the keen, strong air. The room was very cold. Mrs. Maclean did not believe in indulging any of her household in the luxury of bedroom fires. Donald took off his jacket, and then threw himself half-dressed on the bed, and, drawing the blankets over him, in five minutes he was sound asleep. He had set himself the hour for waking, and as three o'clock chimed on the old grandfather's clock on the stairs he sprang out of bed and lit his candle.

Then moving quietly, so that he might not disturb his uncle who slept below, he opened the wardrobe which contained all his belongings, and took a hasty survey of its contents. His trunk being at the school at Perth, the wardrobe was rather empty. However, he managed to gather a few articles which would suffice as a change of clothing. These he stowed into a hand-bag and shut it up tight. Then he took out his purse and counted its contents, and took from the upper shelf in the wardrobe a small cash-box, which contained certain moneys which had been given him from time to time, and which he had carefully saved, not having other temptation or opportunity to spend it in the Glen. His face brightened as he counted out what appeared to be a very large sum, more than sufficient to launch him upon the perilous and uncertain voyage of life. All these preparations completed, he took a hasty glance round the little room, wondering when, and in what mood, he should look upon it again.

Then he stole softly down the stairs into the hall. Luath, the house-dog, lay on a mat in the hall, but he knew the foot, and made no sound except to wag his tail and give himself a satisfied shake. Donald stooped down to pat him, disgusted with himself because he felt an unwonted moisture in his eyes ; and he kept turning yearningly towards the stair, feeling desperately that he could not go without trying to get a farewell word without Fiona, even at the risk of waking up the whole household and being balked in his attempt to carve out his own path in life.

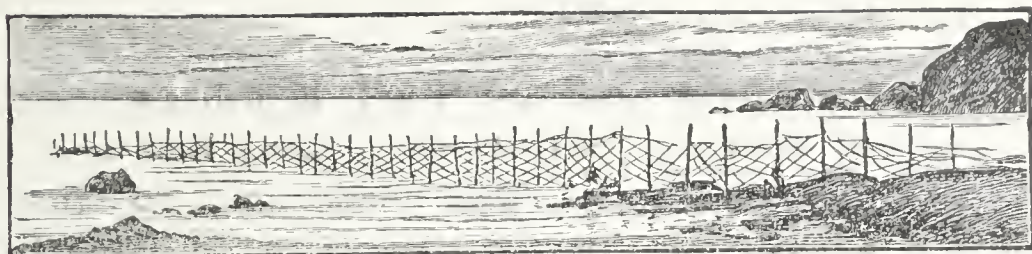
"I'm not caring, Luath, I must see her," he said, and slipped up the stairs softly, two steps at a time.

till he came to her door. He knew that Fiona slept in a little room which opened off a larger one, occupied by her governess, and the chances were that probably the governess would be the first to hear his low knock. But as it chanced Fiona was restless and wakeful, and the moment the low tap came to the door she sprang up, divining instinctively what it meant. She waited only to throw on her warm dressing-gown and a pair of slippers, then she stole softly across the floor and stepped out, closing the door behind her.

"It's me, Fiona," said Donald in a low, eager voice. "I'm going away, and I couldn't without saying good-bye to you, even if it wakened them all up."

"All right, Don ; let's slip downstairs in case we wake Miss MacEwan or uncle," she said, and sped herself before him to the dining-room, where the fire was still smouldering, and where the atmosphere was less chilly than on the upper landing. Donald struck a match and lit one of the tall candles on the mantelpiece.

Then they looked at each other in silence, which was at once solemn and pathetic, and which neither could for a moment break.



CHAPTER IV.

A BITTER PARTING.



“H, Don,” cried Fiona, shivering in spite of herself. “It seems a dreadful thing for you to do, and when, oh when, will you come back?”

“I don’t know,” he answered calmly. “I’ll come back some day when I’ve made a lot of money and a place for myself in the world”

“And what am I to do here till then?” she asked in a low, hopeless voice; and though her eyes were dry, Donald Orde never forgot the tearless misery in them.

“Oh, you’ll be all right,” he said, his own voice faltering slightly. “You won’t forget me, will you?”

“If you think I will, why did you take the trouble to say good-bye to me? It would be better to have just gone away and left me to think what I liked,” she said indignantly.

“Oh, well, I don’t mean anything, Fiona. I won’t forget you, anyhow. Promise me one thing before I go away.”

“I’ll promise you anything you like, Don. Oh,

I wish you could take me too ; it will be terrible up here in Garrows without you, Don, and I think it's cruel of you to go and leave me, so there." All the woman in Fiona's nature was expressed in the last words, and the reproach somewhat troubled Donald.

"Well, but you see I can't, because I'm only a boy, and I have got my own way to make, and I'll come back if I live. But you haven't promised me yet."

"Promised what? You didn't tell me," said Fiona.

"Promise me, if I'm a long time of coming back, that you won't go and marry that Hamish Chisholme. He's an awful sneak, and it would just be like him to try and steal you while I was away."

"How could he do that, Don? Didn't I promise ever so long ago that I'd never marry anybody but you? and I won't, even if I should be an old woman before you come back."

"Nor Roddie MacAlister?" cried Donald jealously. "He's a decent little chap, and if I was an awful time of coming back, perhaps you might be tempted to marry him."

"But I won't," cried Fiona. "Besides, he has never asked me."

"Oh, but he might. I think he will when he grows up, because he likes you; he told me that ever so long ago. He knows he has no chance, because of course you belong to me."

"Yes, I know I do, so you needn't be afraid of my marrying Hamish Chisholme or Roddie either, Donald. Only don't stay away too long."

"I won't. I'll come the very moment I can; and perhaps I'll be great and rich, and come riding

up the Glen in a coach and four. What will Aunt Grace say then, Fiona?"

"She'll feel bad," answered Fiona. "Are you really going now, Don?"

"Yes, I must, or they'll be waking up. Good-bye, then, Fiona. You can kiss me if you like, although I don't approve much of that sort of thing. But it's different when a chap's going away."

Fiona availed herself promptly of this gracious permission, and throwing her arms round his neck, began to weep unrestrainedly. This vexed Donald and angered him very much. "Now that's silly, Fiona, for I'm not going away for ever; and I should never have wakened you up if I thought you would carry on like this. A fellow wants to be encouraged and not to be made miserable when he's going off like this."

At this rebuke Fiona dried her tears and even essayed a smile, which, however, was more pitiful than her weeping.

"I'm going out by this window, Fiona," he said presently. "Nobody will hear it open, and you can shut it after me, and so it will be all right." So saying he began to undo the bolts and shutters and throw them open.

"But you haven't told me where you are going. You must write letters to me."

"I may write, but I can't tell you where I'm going, for I don't know myself. I have a lot of money, and so you needn't worry about me. Good-bye, and take care of yourself. Be civil to Aunt Grace, so that she'll be kind to you, and I'll come back as soon as I can, and perhaps take you away to a far finer place than Garrows."

"Garrows is very nice, and bonnie too," said Fiona wistfully. "Don't you mind when we fished in the burn last year, you said you thought there could be nothing grander in the world than to be the Laird of Garrows and call the Glen your own?"

"I think so yet, Fiona," answered Donald, "but there's not much chance of my being Laird of Garrows. It's more likely that Uncle Hector will leave it to you, and you would make a grand lady of Garrows, Fiona, only I believe you'd give away everything you had in this world to poor folk."

"What's the use of saying things like that, Don? You know fine I could never be lady of Garrows. But oh, I wish you would tell me some more about what you are going to do. Where are you going now when you leave the Glen?"

"Down to Dalnaspidal, of course, to get the first train for the south."

"And will Roddie be going with you?"

"No. I have led Roddie far enough, at least they say that. Maybe he'll be back to the school to-day, when I'm on my way to London."

"To London!" echoed Fiona, her eyes round with wonder. "Will you really go all the way to London, Donald?"

"Ay, and farther," said the lad. "But we're talking too long, Fiona, and you must let me go, or they'll be all waking up, and worse than that, you'll be getting your death of cold. Shut the window and go away back to your bed."

He spoke the last words with a kind of roughness, which was assumed to hide the emotion that almost mastered him, and, giving Fiona a sudden and passionate kiss, he turned about and positively ran

across the gravel, only turning round ere he plunged in the dark shadows of the trees to wave his hand. Fiona waved her hand to him too, and then shut the window with fingers which trembled sadly. A bursting sob broke from her lips as she pushed to the great shutters and slipped in the bolts. She felt as if the darkness of a long night had settled down upon Garrows and upon the Glen.

It was a fine starlit night, the frosty sky as clear as crystal, and a full moon riding royally above the white peak of Craighban. The boy walked rapidly, not suffering himself to look back, for his own heart was almost at the breaking point, and yet underneath his natural regret there lurked a brave determination that the new path he was about to cut out for himself would be one of honour and glory, and that he would never do shame to the Glen he so dearly loved. As he walked through the brisk cold air and left the shadow of the bitter parting behind, his spirits insensibly rose. Youth is not made to mourn, and hope is its constant companion. So after he had looked his last through blinding tears upon the Glen and the dark waters of the loch lying solemn and still under the night sky Donald Orde turned his face manfully away from it, knowing that nothing is to be gained by giving way to an unavailable regret.

When the household at Garrows awoke in the chill dawn of the winter morning he was warming his hands at the fire in the little station-house at Dalnaspidal, and parrying as best he could the questions with which the station-master was inclined to ply him.

Flora did not hasten downstairs that morning. It

was her habit to breakfast with her governess in the school-room, and they had scarcely finished when the door was thrown open with no gentle hand, and the Laird appeared on the threshold.

"Have you seen Donald, Fiona?" he asked gruffly, merely nodding to Miss MacEwan. "I thought maybe he was eating his breakfast with ye."

Fiona could not answer for a moment. She was deathly pale, and her lips trembled. Struck by her evident distress, the Laird looked at her more keenly.

"You seem to be put out, Fiona," he remarked. "Has anything happened to the loon in the night?"

"He has gone away from Garrows, uncle," Fiona answered faintly.

"Has he thought better of it, and gone back to school on his own account?" he asked grimly, not grasping the meaning of her words.

"Oh no. He has gone away for good. Out in the world, I think, to make his fortune."

The Laird leaned up against the half-open door, and laughed silently.

"That's good. I hope he may find it," he said. "And how did you happen to know of this, lassie?"

"He came and woke me up to bid him good-bye. I went down to see him go," answered Fiona quietly. It did not occur to her to prevaricate or pretend that she knew nothing. It was her nature to be truthful, simple, and sincere.

"Oh, indeed. A bonny pair, are they not, Miss MacEwan?" said the Laird, turning to the governess. "Fine ongauns in Garrows in the night time, I must say. And where is my lord gone, and who is to pay his way, I would like to know?"

"He said he had plenty of money, uncle, and I

know his cash-box was nearly full," said Fiona. "He is going to London, and I think he means to go a great deal farther than that."

"Well, we'll let him go; it will be the making or marring of him. Ungrateful young whelp he is, and it was very ill-doing of you, Fiona, to let this happen and not arouse the house. I fear ye are not doing your duty, Miss MacEwan, or she would not be so ready to help in sic ill-doings."

Fiona's sensitive face flushed under this unaccustomed rebuke. Her uncle did not speak much to her at any time, but he had never found fault with her before, and he did it now so sharply that she felt it acutely. The governess also looked troubled and distressed. She heard of what had happened in the night for the first time.

"See that ye teach her obedience and common-sense," said the Laird harshly. "It's a very ill job trying to do your duty by ither folk's bairns." So saying he turned upon his heel, and walked along the narrow passage to his wife's room, where she invariably breakfasted alone.

"Well, he's gone off, Grace. He's saved me the trouble of drumming him back the day."

"What are ye talking about, Maclean?" asked his wife irritably. Her sleep had been haunted by unpleasant dreams, and she had risen with a bad headache.

"Donald. He's run away to seek his fortune, Fiona says. What do ye think of the pair bidding each other good-bye in the middle of the night, and everybody sleeping in Garrows? It's hardly canny, Grace, and I've just been giving my mind to Miss MacEwan, telling her to keep Fiona in better order."

"Do you mean to say that he has actually run away?"

"Yes, it appears so, and I must say that I don't like it," said the Laird, and, striding to the window, he looked down the Glen with eyes which had a strange yearning in them.

The sun, which had risen redly but an hour ago, was now obscured by a great mass of black clouds, and a wild rain was sweeping down the Glen in the teeth of a bitter north wind; the storm was in keeping with Maclean's sad thoughts.

"He'll come back," said Mrs. Maclean, not in the least put out, "and I hope that when he does come back there'll be no mistake about your dealing with him. You've been too soft with him all along, Maclean, and you're cheap served by what he has done this day."

"I was but thinking that maybe I had been ower hard on him, Grace," said the Laird musingly, and his voice had a ring in it which filled her jealous heart with pain. "If he had been happy here with us he would never have gone away. I must down to Sloy Brig and see what the doctor is saying to it, for I'm not easy in my mind."



CHAPTER V.

THE FINAL STEP.



HERE was no sort of indecision or hesitation in the actions of Dona'd Orde that day. He had planned a course for himself and proceeded to carry it out faithfully in every detail.

He arrived in Perth in time to catch the south-going train, and late that night arrived in London. He took a bed at the station hotel, and slept the sound and dreamless sleep of healthy youth, undisturbed by any fears regarding the future which stretched out before him—like a limitless and unknown sea.

He awoke refreshed about ten o'clock the following morning, and rubbed his eyes, puzzled for a moment to remember where he was, and then, when full consciousness flashed upon him, he leapt from his bed and proceeded hurriedly with his dressing, blaming himself for being a laggard on the morning of such a fateful day.

He had never before slept in a public hostelry ; but, though he had been born and reared in the northern wilds, there was a certain dignity and self-possession

about the lad which would have done no discredit to a person of maturer years.

The Ordes of Alvalloch boasted a long descent, and had that calm pride of bearing which nothing else can give. When he had breakfasted he inquired of the waiter where he could find the offices of the best South African steamship lines, and having received this information sallied forth to procure a passage on the first boat.

London was a great revelation to the lad, whose acquaintance with cities was confined to the little provincial town to which he had been sent to school. As he walked its streets that day he was impressed by its greatness and its loneliness. In all the hurrying crowds which seemed to press him on every side there was no familiar face, nor one which looked at him with even a passing interest. Yet there was in that mighty tide of life constantly flowing through the arteries of a great city something which uplifted his soul and filled it with passionate dreams which he could not have put into words. To become a power where he was but a unit was the thought which held him in thrall. The ambition which had lain dormant in the sweet solitary life in the Glen, leaped within him, and he felt all the great possibilities which life holds for those who are willing to do and dare. He had his money hidden safely within his breast-pocket, having remembrance of certain stories he had heard of the dangers to which the inexperienced and ignorant were exposed in London.

He came, after considerable questionings and searchings, to the office of the Castle Line in Fenchurch Street. He found the clerk at the counter very courteous and attentive, but when he stated the sum

required for a first or even second-class passage to the Cape, the lad's face fell.

"I didn't think it was so much," he said falteringly. "I'm afraid I can't afford it."

"Steerage is very good," said the clerk, in his business-like, matter-of-fact way. "£15. I know lots of chaps that have gone out by it, and have found it comfortable enough." As he spoke he looked with some degree of interest at the lad, struck by something in his appearance and manner which singled him out from the common run of those who applied for steerage tickets.

Donald's face brightened. "Oh, I daresay that would do very well. I could afford £15. Is there a steamer sailing?"

"To-morrow the *Pembroke Castle* goes from Tilbury. Will you book for her, or wait till next Friday's steamer?"

"Oh, I'll go to-morrow," cried Donald eagerly, almost joyfully. "I'm glad it's so soon. It's rather expensive living in London when a chap has not much money."

The clerk smiled understandingly. It was not his business to ask questions, but it struck him that there was something odd in this aristocratic lad being so anxious to get out of England at the earliest possible moment. But he kept his wonderings to himself, and simply wrote out the passage ticket and took the payment for it in Scotch bank-notes and loose silver, which Donald counted out carefully, and after the manner of one who has to consider the outlay of every penny. He put the precious slip of paper carefully in his breast-pocket, and having made sure about the of hour sailing and the means of transport to Tilbury

he left the office, his purse considerably lightened, but relieved to think the final step was taken.

His mind was so full of the future that he forgot the way he had come, and after having walked a considerable distance found himself at sea in a labyrinth of streets, where the traffic was so congested that it was difficult to pilot his way through. He came to what appeared to be a place of considerable importance—a point where many streets converged and where the traffic seemed to reach its culminating point. A kindly policeman informed him that he was at the Mansion House, and further pointed out the Bank, and gave him some other items of information which were of great interest. He was still speaking to his obliging acquaintance when some one gave him a smart tap on the elbow with an umbrella ; and when he turned round sharply what was his amazement and consternation to behold the face of Mr. M'Donald, his own minister from Glen Garrows.

"I could not believe my eyes, Donald Orde," said the minister. "And yet I thought to myself that it was either you or your ghost. What are you doing here, may I ask? The last I heard of you, you were at Mr. Thomson's school in Perth, and not expected home till the vacation in July."

"I'm not there now, anyhow," answered Donald, with a most unusual sullenness in his voice, for it was rather serious for him, that at this critical point in his career, he should have been overtaken, as it were, by the minister of Glen Garrows. What more natural than that he should be on his Uncle Maclean's side? He might even take extreme measures to get him detained and sent back to the Glen.

"I see you are not much pleased to see me, my

lad," said the minister with a quizzical smile. "But it maybe that I can be of some use to you just at this particular crisis in your career. Yes, I know it's a crisis, or you wouldn't be here. Where are you staying?"

"I slept last night at the Euston Hotel," answered Donald, "and I suppose I'll sleep there to-night, but to-morrow I sail for Cape Town," he said quietly, yet with a certain determined pride. "I've got my passage in my pocket."

"Oh, then I'll be able to see you off," said the minister cheerfully. "You'll find when it comes to the last moment that there are worse things than a familiar face and a familiar voice to wish you God-speed. When did you come up?"

"Only last night. We didn't get in till after eleven."

"Then you haven't seen much of London. It would be a pity to leave Old England, wouldn't it, without seeing something of this city? I don't suppose you have many pressing engagements to-day; neither have I. Suppose we make a day of it?"

Donald stood still on the kerb and looked up at him with a quick, eager, questioning glance. He did not know Mr. M'Donald well. He had heard him preach often in the old kirk at Glen Garrows, and had occasionally seen him at his uncle's house. If he had thought of him at all it was as a plain and pleasant-spoken gentleman, not bad for a minister, as he might have expressed it, but it now occurred to him that there was a great deal more in that pleasant and kind face than he had imagined.

The minister was a bachelor and wearing on to middle life, but he had managed to keep the youthful

spirit, and had a great power and influence over the young people in the Glen.

"You're trying to fathom me, are you not, Donald?" he asked with his quiet smile. "And you'd like to ask me point blank, wouldn't you, whether I have any sinister designs on you? You haven't told me anything, but I can guess a good lot. You have taken French leave of the Glen, haven't you?"

"Yes," answered Donald, relieved to be able to give this straightforward reply.

"And you want me to promise that I won't take hold of you forcibly and carry you back. Well, you can keep your mind easy. I see that the time has come when you must choose your own lot in life, and though maybe I don't approve of the method you have chosen to gain your ambitions, it is no business of mine to thwart it; but you'll let me see something of you to-day, and I'll go down with you to the dock to-morrow to bid you God-speed, Donald Orde, for the sake of those that are away."

Now this was the manner of speech calculated to win and melt the heart of Donald Orde. The minister, watching him keenly, while appearing careless and unconcerned, saw the softening of his eye and the quiver of the lip he was powerless to control. So he drew the boy's hand within his arm and led him as one familiar with London streets through the throng, and presently took him on the top of an omnibus and rode with him to the Tower, in which, as he expected, the boy took an intelligent and delighted interest. He took him to his own lodging to dine, and afterwards to a place of amusement. He had skill in the understanding and management of the young, and though he had no children of his

own seemed to know their needs and what was best calculated to win their confidence and love. I believe that had the minister asked Donald to go back with him next day to the Glen, he might have been able to persuade him.

They met early the next day, and went down together in the train from Fenchurch Street to the dock at Tilbury. By skilful questioning the minister had been able to discover that the lad's outfit was of a very meagre description. When he appeared at the station he carried a large portmanteau, the meaning of which he did not explain to the boy till they were on board.

"I suppose you have heard, Donald, that your Uncle Ian, your mother's brother, went to South Africa more than twenty years ago, and has never been heard of since?" he said, as they sat together in the railway carriage.

"Yes," answered the boy quickly, wondering how the minister knew and seemed to divine his every thought. "I hope I shall come across Uncle Ian in Africa. My mother used to tell me often about him."

"He was a fine lad, and I loved him as my own brother," said the minister. "We were at college together, Donald, and a man 'seldom forgets or grows cold to a college chum."

An hour later, as they stood together on the great deck of the outward bound ship, the minister saw that though he kept up manfully the lad's heart was full.

"I have left the bag I brought down in your cabin, Donald, and I have spoken to the steward that whenever you sail that your cabin will be shifted to

the first-class quarters. I have paid the difference. Hush, it's nothing. I am not a poor man. There were many besides Orde of Alvalloch who loved your mother, Donald. I was one, and I would do a lot more for the laddie who has her eyes and the very music of her voice."

Then, moved beyond all endurance or control, Donald Orde laid his head down suddenly upon the rail at the ship's side and burst into tears. He was not ashamed of these tears, nor had he any need. They were no dishonour to his young manhood. The minister's eyes were not dry as he let his hand fall affectionately upon the lad's bent head.

"Have you any message for your uncle, Donald? I shall be able to relieve his mind when I go back, and I think that if you will send a kind message to him through me you will never regret it. It's not our kind deeds we shall regret when the Book of Life is made up, but the other ones, Donald."

"Tell him that I'm sorry if I vexed him, and that he need not be afraid that I will ever disgrace Garrows or the name I bear."

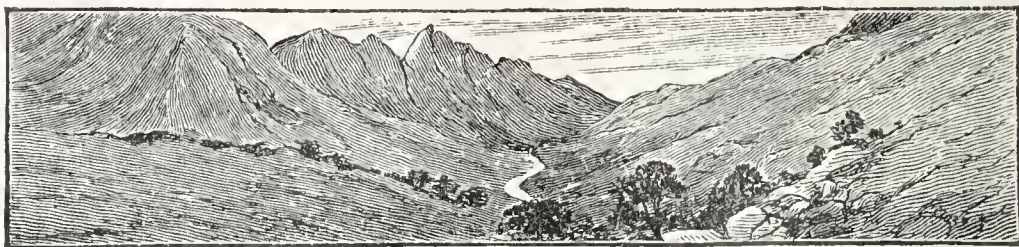
"And Fiona?" said the minister, with a slight, tender emphasis on the sweet-sounding name.

"Fiona knows everything," said the lad, drawing himself up with slightly flushed cheeks. "But you can tell her, if you like, that my last thought was of the day when I should come back and see her again."

"Keep her image in your heart, lad," said the minister fervently. "You are very young, but it may be your salvation yet to think of Fiona and her love for you. And now God bless you. I pray that He may spare me to welcome you back to the Glen. That will be a proud day for us all."

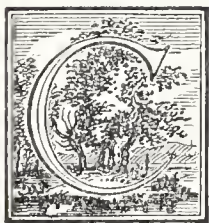
The parting bell was peremptorily rung, and as the minister held the boy's hand close and fast in his own, he bade God bless him in a voice which all effort could not steady. As for Donald, he was weeping unrestrainedly, and though he tried to speak and afterwards to smile as he waved his hand to the departing tender it was a poor attempt.

For the moment everything was blotted out but sweet and passionate remembrance of the Glen from which, perhaps, he had parted for evermore.



CHAPTER VI.

OUTWARD BOUND.



ARE sits lightly on the heart of youth, and regret does not long pursue its path. Before the *Pembroke Castle* reached Southampton Donald Orde had thrown off the shadow of his parting with Mr. M'Donald and began to take a lively interest in what was going on around him. There was indeed much to astonish as well as to interest the country-bred lad, and during the first twelve hours of the voyage he had no time to feel lonely or to realise the forlornness of his position. He was now fairly on his way to a strange land where he had neither friends nor prospects. The slender contents of his purse were now reduced to the sum of £10 in English gold. Any money he might require beyond that had to be earned ; but that seemed a small matter to him when he gave it a thought. He was young and strong, and had the indomitable spirit which seeks to carry everything before it. He knew nothing, of course, of the competition for employment, scarcely less keen in the New World than in the Old, nor did it occur to him that there is no place for the

unskilled labourer in any part of the world, New or Old.

The boat had its full complement of passengers, it being the season of the year favourable for the outward bound. The passenger who shared Donald's cabin was a middle-aged man, who looked like a foreigner. He was tall and stout, with a dark, sallow face, and features of the Jewish type. Donald was not particularly drawn to him at first. There was something in the man's style of dress and the excess of the jewellery he wore which offended the boy's somewhat fastidious taste. The first time they met in the little cabin they were to share for the next three weeks they regarded each other in silence for a moment. The elder was the first to speak.

"Well, younker, so we are to be room-mates for the next twenty days. Well, we may as well be civil to each other. I've found out your name already, and it's a real Scotch one. We're favourable to the Scotch in the place I come from. They make good settlers, and good neighbours when you once get the hang of them. My name's Van Ruysler, though I ought to drop the Van to please my wife; she doesn't like anything to remind her of my Dutch extraction."

"Do you live in Africa?" asked Donald, rather awkwardly, finding these confidences from an entire stranger a trifle embarrassing.

"Yes. I've a nice place on the borders of Orange Free State. That's where I made my pile. Perhaps you're bound for there?"

"I don't know where I'm going," answered Donald candidly, yet with a certain reserve which might have warned the stranger that he had no desire to reciprocate his confidence.

"Oh, I see, going to seek your fortune, I suppose? Well, you look fit enough. I shouldn't wonder if you struck oil. Got any relatives in the Colony?"

"I've an uncle who came out a lot of years ago, but I don't even know what part he went to, and I don't suppose that I shall come across him."

"You might. Queer things happen out there, and the coincidences are remarkable. Perhaps you have got influential introductions, then, if you have no friends?"

"No. I have not got a single introduction," answered Donald; and beginning to resent this familiar cross-questioning, he turned his back on his room-mate and began to busy himself about the portmanteau the minister had left him.

Mr. Van Ruysler smiled, understanding his action quickly enough, and admiring rather than resenting it. "You have got a lot of Scotch pride about you, my lad," he said quietly; "and if it doesn't do you any good, it won't do you much harm perhaps. Though I doubt, if it's your fortune you're going to seek, you'll have to sink a bit of it. We're not very fond of airs in the Colony, and most of our young aristocrats find that they would have done better to leave that part of their outfit at home."

"I'm not an aristocrat," said Donald quickly.

"Aren't you? well, you look it," said the colonist frankly. "You gave your head a turn which says as plain as if you uttered it—'What the deuce does this fellow mean by asking me so many questions?'"

Donald laughed, and his face flushed a little. These words exactly expressed his thought, and his natural courtesy made him feel ashamed that he should have shown it so plainly.

"You needn't look so put out," said the colonist good-humouredly. "I like you all the better for it, and I promise you that I won't intrude myself too much. At the same time it's just as well that two room-mates should know each other, and, besides, it's just possible that you might be glad of a friend one of these days, and if you should happen to land in my quarter of the Colony, you'll find that the name of Van Ruysler counts for something."

Van Ruysler kept his word, and though he was very courteous and frank to the boy, he did not ask him any more questions, nor seek in the slightest degree to force his confidence. It was impossible, of course, to be in such close quarters with any man without gaining some knowledge of him, and Donald quickly overcame the sense of personal dislike which he had experienced at first sight of him.

He was very lonely and home-sick during the first part of the voyage, and was grateful to any who spoke kindly to him or showed him a friendly face.

Van Ruysler also watched the lad keenly, interested in him beyond measure, and curious also to know under what circumstances he came to be taking this solitary and apparently aimless voyage. It was evident that Van Ruysler was a man of considerable means, and also that he had some standing in his own neighbourhood. He spoke with authority of the internal affairs of the Colony, and was listened to with attention, although his views were often combated by those who took part in the discussion.

Donald did not say much, but kept both eyes and ears open, convinced of the importance of learning something of the new country to which he was hastening; and he could gather from the general

talk that it was somewhat difficult for the poor and the friendless to succeed there, as it is at home almost as difficult.

The voyage was pleasant and without event. In the third week Donald found it rather monotonous, and was not sorry when he heard that another twenty-four hours would bring them within sight of land.

He was sitting with Van Ruysler one evening on deck, conscious of a mysterious inward excitement at the approach of a great crisis in his life. Van Ruysler had been watching him more closely than usual during the last day or two, and now he ventured to approach the subject which had been in his mind, though he had received no encouragement to utter it.

"We'll be on dry land to-morrow by this time, thank God," he said, as he refilled his long pipe and pressed the tobacco down with his forefinger. "Nineteen times have I crossed this infernal ocean, and I'm a bit sick of it. I've five days more till I get to Natal, and then a goodish journey by ox team."

"Five days more! On another steamer, do you go?" inquired Donald, with consuming interest. "Why, what a huge place it must be! Don't you go by train as we do in England?"

"Hardly," said Van Ruysler drily. "There are no trains to speak of. You didn't think South Africa was a village, did you? Why, it's a continent, and a monster continent too."

"Of course I've learnt that too," said Donald meekly. "But a fellow doesn't think."

"You'll need to think, my lad," put in Van Ruysler grimly. "It's a hand-to-mouth struggle to get a

living in the Colony in these days. Now, suppose you tell me what you propose to do with yourself, and why you are here at all; but not if you don't want to. I'm the last man to force a fellow's confidence. But I like you, and I had a little lad who would have been your age if he had lived."

Donald hesitated a moment, but when he stole a look at the settler's face he saw a softness there which moved him to unburden his heart. So he told him the story of his life in the Glen, and of how he had been moved to run away from Garrows and seek his fortune across the sea. Only he never mentioned the name of Fiona, for already memory and distance seemed to have enshrined her in the sanctuary of his heart, and he could not speak her name to a stranger who would never understand the place she filled in his life.

Van Ruysler was a cool, hard-headed man of business, careful even to grasping in money matters, and not given to sentiment of any kind; but the lad's story touched the one soft spot in his heart, and there was something in his fine, open face and noble bearing which stirred in him the fatherly instinct, and made him wish to extend to him a helping hand.

"Well, lad, it's not for me to say whether you have done well or ill," he said, pulling his slouch hat over his eyes really to hide the moisture in them. "If fortune favours you I suppose the world will say you have done well; and if not you will be what they call in your country a ne'er-do-weel. We get a lot of them at the Cape, and some of them turn up trumps. Well, I've a farm out in the Veldt, and there's plenty to do on it for man

and beast. If you are willing to work, I'll give you work to do. It'll be better for you than loafing about Cape Town. That's been the ruin of many a hundred of your kind. When you go to ask for a job there, they'll look at you from top to toe, and unless you hide these soft hands from them they'll give you the bitter truth to your face. Have you as much money as would take you up to my part of the country?"

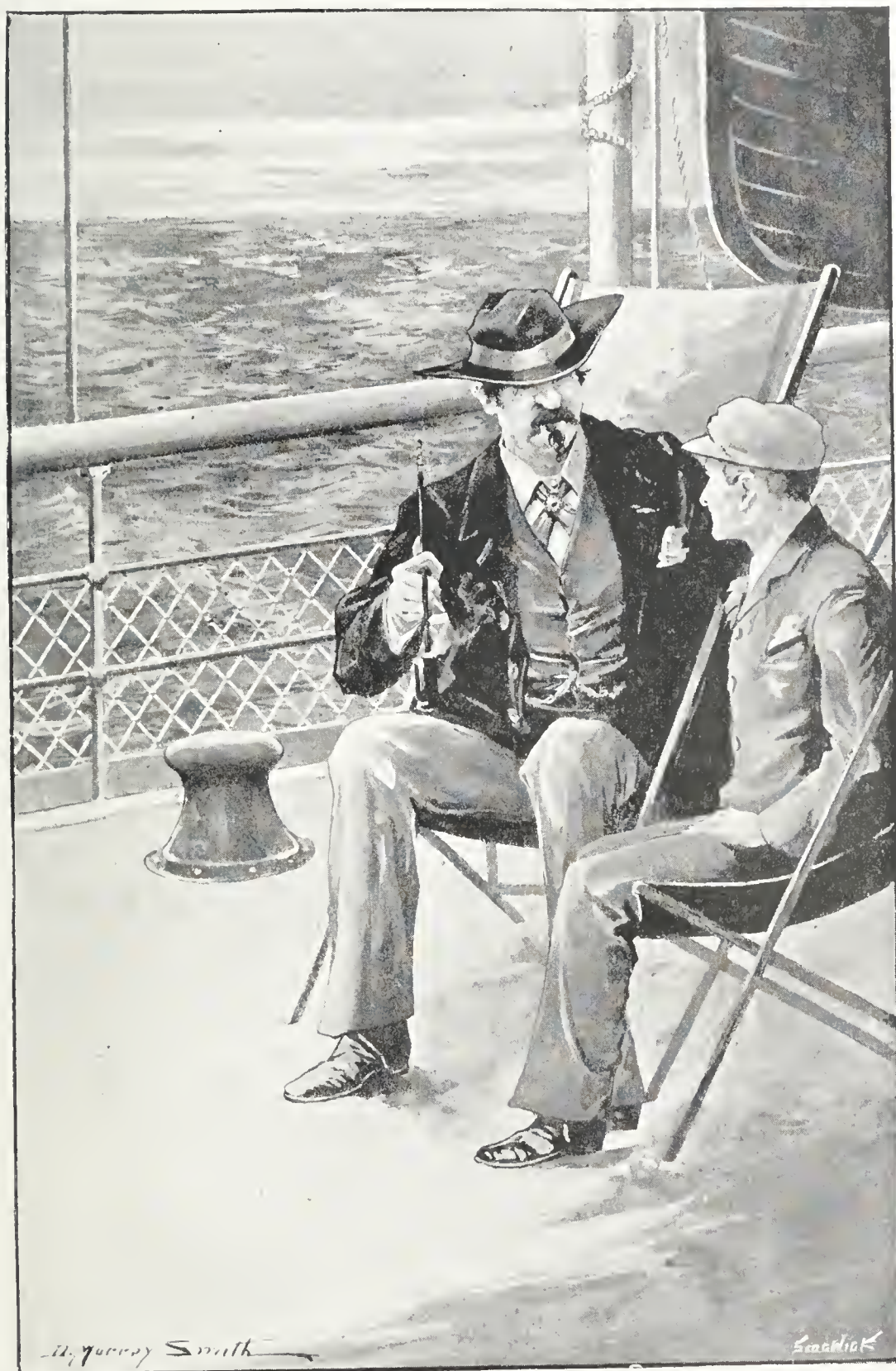
"I've £10," said Donald, in rather a quiet, depressed voice. What had seemed a great sum to him in England dwindled into nothingness in his sight when he thought of the land of immense distances to which he had come.

"It'll do," said the settler, though it was far short of the actual sum required. "You might do worse than invest it in the journey up to my place. I've a wife and a daughter who will make you welcome. But mind it's to work you are bidden and not to play. There's no idle hands suffered there."

"I'll be very glad to come," said Donald gratefully, "and you'll see I'll not be afraid to work. What makes you wish to be so kind to a fellow like me whom you have never seen before?"

"I don't know," answered the settler with a rather embarrassed laugh. "I'm not given to that sort of thing as a general rule. I've seen too much evil result from picking up chance acquaintances. But there's something about you that appeals to a man—to the softer side of him, I mean—and I'd like to give you a chance for the sake of that lad of mine who would have been your age if he had lived."

"You won't regret it if I can help it," said Donald



“IF YOU ARE WILLING TO WORK, I’LL GIVE YOU WORK TO DO.” [Page 50.]

with a quiet emphasis which said more than a multitude of words.

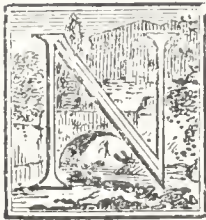
"All right," said Van Ruysler, extending his hand. "We'll shake hands on it, and if you do fair and square by me you won't regret it. There's worse things you'll find than keeping the right side of Van Ruysler."

So the compact was sealed, and an immediate load was lifted off the heart of Donald Orde; but could he have lifted the veil of the future and seen the tragedy hidden within its folds, the tragedy towards which this was the first step, he had hesitated before he made the first compact and sealed it by clasp of hand.



CHAPTER VII.

THE NEW HOME.



NEXT day the *Pembroke Castle* sailed into the harbour at Cape Town. Donald and his new friend went on shore at once. The boat for Natal was to sail the following morning, but Van Ruysler had a good deal of business to do in the town and took Donald with him to the various offices, where he seemed to be a welcome and respected visitor.

The talk to which the boy was obliged to listen there was all of companies and shares and financial interests ; and it was quite easy for him to gather that Van Ruysler was a person of importance, who had large interests in various financial concerns. When he had concluded all his business he took Donald for a drive through the town, explaining its various interesting features in the most affable and intelligent manner. Finally he took him to a large clothing store, and bought what appeared to Donald an enormous supply of articles more suited to the climate than those he had brought from Scotland.

They slept that night in the best hotel in Cape Town, and next morning set sail for Natal. The

second voyage was as uneventful as the first, and the steamer arrived at Durban in due course.

An hour or two later Donald was sitting beside his new friend under the grateful shade of the bullock waggon, lumbering across the plains to his new home. He felt almost like one in a dream, and yet he was keenly alive to every feature of his new surroundings.

It had been a long spell of dry weather, and the lonely plains across which the bullock waggon heavily lumbered seemed to stretch before them like the wild reaches of the desert. Here and there a few tufts of grass or green hardy plants were visible in the shelter of some clumps of stones or shady boulders, but the stunted Karroo bushes were almost the only vegetation, and these the pitiless sun seemed to have withered as if with some poisonous blight. In the daytime the prospect was dreary in the extreme, and the lad who had come from the land of mountain and flood, of vast forests and rich pastures, felt his heart sink with the desolation of the new world to which he had come. At night, however, when, after the rapid passing of the twilight, the full moon shone out with its weird, white light, it seemed to shed a strange and unspeakable beauty over the whole earth.

About nine o'clock they came to a small and forlorn-looking inn, built in the shelter of a kopje, or small hillock, surrounded by a clump of prickly pear trees. There was so little sign of life about this miserable place that they had drawn the oxen right up to the door and alighted before anybody appeared; and then a little fat German appeared in his shirt sleeves, and rubbing his eyes as if he had been aroused from sleep.

"Hullo, Muller," cried Van Ruysler cheerily. "You are just where I left you, as sleepy-headed as ever.

Help them to get the cattle outspanned and get us something to eat. We shall have to sleep here to-night."

The German nodded understandingly and bade the settler—who was an old friend of his—a somewhat gruff welcome back. He took no notice of Donald, nor did Van Ruysler make any remark about the companion he had picked up on his travels. He left the men to see to the cattle and stepped within the low door of the inn, beckoning Donald to follow him. They came into a spacious, low-ceiled kitchen, in which there was a great wide fireplace and a long table set in the middle of the floor ready for the reception of guests. The innkeeper's wife—fat and indolent and good-natured like himself—got up from her chair and bade Van Ruysler welcome. Then she put some faggots below the kettle, in order that it might quickly boil to make her unexpected guests some black, strong coffee.

"Who have you brought back with you, mynheer?" she asked, as she stumped about the kitchen getting various articles from the cupboard and placing them on the table. "You come and go so much that one never knows what you will bring next."

"This is a young friend from Scotland. He has a notion to see what our farm life is on the Veldt. Perhaps he will have enough of it before he has done, Frau Muller."

"Ah, who knows?" she said with a knowing smile. "They will be rejoiced to see you back at the farm, mynheer. I daresay they have been lonely enough without you."

"Heard anything about them since I left, Frau Muller?" asked Van Ruysler.

"Nothing much, only that madam has been rather poorly. Doort was here one day about two weeks ago, and he said she had been complaining, but that the young mademoiselle is well."

"She has not been down so far, then?" asked Van Ruysler, with a tender light in his eyes. "She promised me not to take such mad rides while I was away."

"She has not come this way, mynheer," answered the landlady truthfully. "She is a brave rider, and I love to see her on horseback. She sits like a queen."

"Well, if you have got something ready for us we will eat," he said, "and then to bed. Call us at sunrise, Frau Muller, for I'm anxious to get home. The latter part of a long journey is always the most tedious."

"That is so," she answered; and pouring out the coffee she pushed it towards them, and then cut some thick slices from the home-made loaf, and piled their plates high with slices of cold meat.

When they had finished their meal Donald was at once shown to the little cabin upstairs where he was to sleep. He fancied himself too excited to fall asleep, but the wine of that rare atmosphere had its full effect upon him, and almost before his head touched his pillow he fell into a dreamless slumber, haunted to the last by the murmur of voices from the kitchen below.

At the glorious sunrise they were all astir, and set out again in the waggon, the patient oxen lumbering on at that slow but steady and sure pace which covered the ground with considerable speed. As the sun rose high in the heavens, and glared down pitilessly on the treeless waste, Donald understood the meaning of their early start, and he was

glad when they came at noon to the grateful shade of a clump of trees, surrounding a well of spring water, where they halted through the long hot hours till sundown and made up the sleep which they had lost. A few more hours in the still delicious coolness of the evening and they came within sight of their destination. Long before Donald's unaccustomed eyes could detect any object on the horizon Van Ruysler had pointed out to him the ridge of low hills which skirted the plain where the homestead was situated. At last, however, he could detect the clustering walls of the sheep kraals and Kaffir huts, which looked like a considerable village at the base of the hill, and a little higher up a large, rambling, red-brick building, surrounded on three sides by trees. Donald felt a strange thrill of excitement at his heart at the prospect of entering this new home. It stood—save for its own surrounding of little homesteads—absolutely and solemnly alone, hundreds of miles from any town or city, and far beyond the beaten track or the highways of human commerce. The thought in Donald's mind as they neared this strange and lonely place was one of wonder how any man had been tempted to build a home for himself so far remote from the haunts of men.

Long before the waggon reached the homestead their approach became known to those who dwelt there, and it was as if the whole tiny population turned out to meet it. They were speedily surrounded by a motley collection of human beings, who seemed to Donald's wondering and unaccustomed eyes to represent a large variety of the human race. There were Kaffirs in their scanty attire, heavy and ill-dressed Boers, and a large sprinkling of children of

all ages and sizes. But there seemed no one of Van Ruysler's own kin to welcome him until they reached the very gates of the homestead. Then a figure in white came flying down the hill from the farmhouse—a girl's figure, with a mass of bright golden hair flying in the night air, her face radiant with expectant love. She pushed her way through the crowd about the waggon, who indeed fell away respectfully to let her pass, and she threw herself sobbing into Van Ruysler's arms, calling him by every endearing name, brokenly, as if her heart were almost too full for speech.

Donald instinctively turned away from this meeting, and was standing somewhat lonely a little distance from the cattle, amused by the antics of some small Kaffir boys, who evidently regarded him with wonder and amazement, when Van Ruysler suddenly called to him,—

“Come here, Donald, and let me introduce you to my daughter.”

He approached shyly, feeling some awe of this rare creature after being shut off from the sight and companionship of womenkind for so long.

“Why, who is this, father?” the girl cried imperiously: “You never told us you were bringing any one home with you. Where does he come from, and what does he want?”

“Hush, Julie, not so fast,” said Van Ruysler fondly. “This is a gentleman your mother will be pleased to see. His name is Donald Orde, and he comes from Scotland, and I wish you to be very kind to him, for his heart is the heart of an exile. This is my daughter Julie, Donald, and I hope you and she will be good friends.”

"I hope so too, sir," said Donald quietly, and his self-possession returning to him he bent his head over the brown, slim hand extended to him, and his bearing was noble and manly enough to excite Julie Van Ruysler's wonder and admiration.

"This is very interesting, father," she said with a bright glance. "It is so long since we had anybody nice here. I hope you will stay a long time," she added to Donald. "Nice people always go : it is only the horrid ones that stay."

At this Van Ruysler laughed a loud laugh, and drawing her hand through his arm, proceeded towards the house, Donald following, still conscious of that strange feeling of unreality, as if he were dreaming a dream, instead of taking part in actual life.

"And how is the mother, little one?" said Van Ruysler to the girl who hung fondly on his arm.

"She is at least not any worse," answered Julie. "To-day she has been downstairs, and she had not gone to bed when I heard a noise at the kraals and guessed you had come."

"That's well ; and why don't you ask what I have brought from England?" he asked teasingly.

"Oh, I want nothing from England except you," said the girl fondly. And Donald saw that her face was softened into the rarest tenderness. He could scarcely keep his eyes off her face ; she seemed to him a creature so exquisite that he wondered whether she could be real or would presently flit away for ever from his vision.

She became conscious of his close scrutiny presently, and as they stepped within the door she turned to him suddenly and spoke.

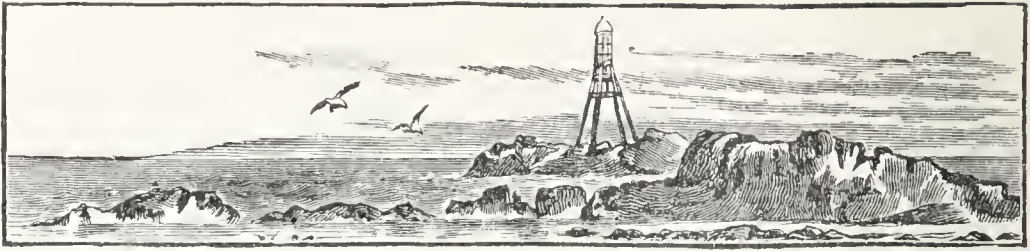
"Why do you look at me so intently?" she asked.

“Is there anything odd about me, anything unlike what you have ever seen before?”

Donald reddened and uttered a hasty word of apology, to which, however, she deigned no reply. Then they came within the house, which in all its furnishings and arrangements closely copied the European style. Van Ruysler's wife, more or less of an invalid always, had come downstairs to welcome him home, and stood in the hall a tall, elegant figure in a loose white gown, which she wore with grace and distinction. Her pale, clear-cut face, distinctly French in feature, was bright with joy at her husband's home-coming. Again Donald turned away, Scotch-like, not to witness their greeting. But presently Van Ruysler called to him to come and be introduced.

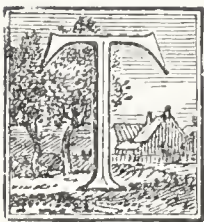
“I am pleased to see you,” she said, as she clasped his hand. “We bid you welcome to Ruysfontein, and hope you will be happy here with us.”

“Thank you, madam,” said Donald, and as their eyes met madam suddenly bent forward and kissed him on the brow. So was he made welcome to his new home in a distant land.



CHAPTER VIII.

BOUND.



THE two sat in the shelter of a great boulder on the side of the hill behind the farmhouse, with their faces towards the setting sun. The fierce, copper-coloured glare had died out of the sky, and a thousand lovely hues, undreamed of by the painter, were spread from the edge of the horizon until they melted and were lost in the clear soft blueness of the night sky. The still air was broken at intervals by the sounds from the little village, where the Kaffirs were making sociable and merry after their day's work was done. Occasionally the cry of some desert creature or belated bird fell upon their ears and was unheeded by them. The shelter of that particular boulder had long been used as a favourite resting-place, two little seats having been hollowed out of the face of the solid rock to serve as armchairs. In one the girl sat, her white gown showing in vivid contrast to the dark-grey granite. Her hat lay upon the short grass beside her, and her dusky eyes looked out dreamily from under the masses of her red-gold hair. The boy lay on the ground at her

feet, his head bare also, tracing with his fingers impossible figures in the dry soft sand.

"What I want to know is," said Julie, in a somewhat petulant voice, "why do you never tell me about your own country and the friends you have left there? You have been here a whole month, and we know nothing about you more than we did the first day papa brought you home. Tell me something about that dreadful uncle of yours. I love to hear of the dreadful people who are cruel and unkind; it makes one feel so comfortable and safe."

The boy raised himself on his elbow, and looked at her with a curious, uncertain glance.

"I don't think that's a very nice disposition," he said, with that frankness which carried something winning with it, though it sometimes gave offence. "It is very easy to talk like that when you know nothing about it."

"Well, but I do want to hear about your uncle. He must have treated you very badly before you actually ran away from him."

"He didn't treat me badly at all," said Donald quickly—distance and memory having already softened the thought of the grim old chief far away among the fastnesses of his Highland hills. "In fact, I rather think now that it was I who treated him badly."

"Oh, that is not nearly so interesting," said Julie. "I wish you would describe your home to me. I have often read about Scotland, and I should like to go there."

"Perhaps you will some day," said Donald. "It is the grandest country God has made."

"Better than this?" asked the girl. "Just look at those lovely colours in the sky. I'm sure you never see anything like that in your country."

"No, we don't," he answered shortly. "We have grey skies mostly, and wild rains sweeping over the hills just like a great army which nothing can keep back. You should see the Garrows burn when it is in flood, it carries everything before it."

"The Garrows burn," she repeated, and the beloved name uttered in that soft, half-foreign tongue sent a thrill to the boy's heart. "The Garrows burn," she repeated; "what does it mean, what is it?"

"A stream, a river which rises away up in the mountains and flows right down to our Glen. A lot of little streams tumble into it on the way, and so by the time it comes to Garrows it is a great wide water. You should see the deep pools in it, and the trout! Many a time Fiona and I have caught a round dozen in less than an hour."

"Who?" she asked sharply. "Who is Fiona? I don't think I say it like you, but tell me who Fiona is?"

Her quick eye detected the flush which rose to the lad's face, when he had thus betrayed himself.

"Fiona," he repeated slowly, and his face was turned away. "Just Fiona."

"But I want to know more," said Julie, with an imperious stamp of her little foot. "Is it a boy or a girl, or what? I know it's a girl from that red flush on your cheek, and I know what you are thinking—of the time when you will make your fortune in this country of ours, and then go back and marry her. That is always how they do in books. Am I not right?"

He did not immediately answer her, but kept his eyes fixed on the sand with which his fingers played. For the moment he forgot that he was an exile on African soil, and his strange and new surroundings were all shut out. He saw nothing but a great bare room, lit by the flickering light of a solitary candle, and a girl's face at the open window looking up into his, white with the anguish of farewell.

"Why do you not speak?" cried Julie with a little passionate ring in her voice. "I hate people who moon like that, and who are so rude as not to answer when they are spoken to. Tell me about this Fiona of yours. Is she a pretty girl?"

"Yes, I think she is," answered the boy, but dully, as if he had only a faint interest in what she was saying.

"Prettier than I am?" she asked next.

He raised himself on his elbow again, and looked at her with critical frankness.

"No," he answered, "she is not so pretty as you."

"I'm glad of that," Julie answered, slightly mollified. "I suppose she is very good. Do you like her better than me?"

"Well, you see it's different," said the boy quietly. "I have known her all my life."

"That means that you do like her better," said Julie petulantly, "and I think it is horrid of you, because I'm sure we have been very kind to you since you came here."

"Yes, indeed you have. I was only thinking about it to-day. I'm going to speak to your father to-morrow—to-night perhaps, if I get an opportunity."

"What are you going to say to him?" she asked,

pulling a tuft of dry grass from the warm sand, and twisting it in her slender brown fingers.

"Well, I'm going to tell him that I can't stop here any longer living on his bounty."

"But you're not living on his bounty," said the girl quickly. "You do all sorts of things. You can never come out to ride or walk with me when I want you because you have always something to do for papa."

"Oh, that's nothing. I have been here a whole month, as you reminded me, and it's time I sought for something to do. I shall never forget the kindness I have received here, and I'm sure I shall never be able to repay it."

"What is the use of saying things like that?" asked Julie, her red lips curling in scorn. "You know that unless we liked you, and wished to have you here, we should not ask you to stay. Everybody is selfish like that, and nobody presses disagreeable people to stay; at least we don't. That's why we have so few visitors. We have dropped everybody, because they bored us so dreadfully."

Sometimes Julie was quite a child in her manner and speech; at others she seemed like a woman of the world. Donald liked her best in her simpler moods. These somewhat cynical words jarred upon him as he heard them. Watching him intently she saw his face grow graver, and with the unerring intuition which was part of her passionate Southern nature she taxed him with it at once.

"Shall I tell you what you are thinking? That your Fiona—what a name it is!—would not say such things. Of course she is a paragon, like the young ladies we read about in the books which come

out from England. I'm quite sure I shall hate her when I see her."

"I don't suppose you ever will see her," said Donald absently.

"Why not? In a year or two, when I am quite grown up, papa has promised that he will take me to Europe. Do you think that I shall leave Scotland out, now that I've seen you?"

"I don't suppose you will, but you will tear through it—as all the tourists do—and think half a day is enough to spend in Edinburgh, for instance, where a man could live a year and not know it at the end of it."

"Are all Scotchmen like you," asked Julie, "so solemn and sober, and taking life so dreadfully in earnest?"

"I suppose they are; at least people say so," said Donald. "How old are you, Julie?"

The suddenness of this question made her open her dusky eyes with wonder.

"Do you know that is a very rude question? But I do love people who always say and do what one doesn't expect, so I will tell you. I am eighteen."

"Are you?" said Donald, looking at her with interest. "I should not have thought you were more than sixteen."

"That is because I wear my hair down. Next year I shall put it up, and if mamma is able we shall go to some of the balls in Durban. Then you will have to be very respectful to me, and I shall snub you unmercifully, and then perhaps you will like me all the more. I have heard that is the way to treat men if you want them to treat you well."

"Where did you learn all that rubbish?" asked Donald. "Nobody likes to be snubbed, and if you snub me, miss, I'll give you it back, I promise you that."

"We'll see," she said, nodding her head sagely. "Now, how old are you, may I ask?"

"Not so old as you. I shall not be eighteen till October."

"And your Fiona?"

"Fiona is only a child—at least, she is sixteen. But she does not look like you."

"Does she wear short frocks and pinafores?"

"No. Her frocks are not very long though, now that I come to think of it, because when we used to tramp over the bogs and fish in the little loch she never held them up like you do. I see Mr. Van Ruysler ever so far away," he said, sitting up suddenly. "Do you see yon black speck away at the foot of the low hills? that's him."

"I suppose it is," she answered carelessly. "He generally gets home about this time when he has been to Muller's. You are not really going to leave us, are you, Donald?"

There was a certain wistfulness in her voice which betrayed considerable inward anxiety.

"I don't know. I must speak to him anyhow, because I can't live this idle life any longer. The Scotch are nothing if not independent, and there is nothing that they hate worse than eating the bread of charity."

"I think it's most rude of you to talk of eating the bread of charity here. You have just paid us a visit, as many others do. I shouldn't mind if you stayed a little longer. You amuse me. I suppose I

shall get tired of you after a while, especially if you keep on being so solemn over everything. Mamma likes you too, I know, and would wish you to stay. She said to me only this morning she wished you were her son. But I am glad you are not. I'm quite sure I should hate to have a brother; they are so selfish and domineering always."

"You speak as if you knew everything," said Donald, picking himself up from the sand. "I think women are quite as selfish as men. They think of nothing but what they want for themselves."

She did not take offence at these blunt words. They had had many such passages during the last month, and still were very good friends.

"I'm going out to meet Mr. Van Ruysler," he added, and left her unceremoniously.

She sat still in the gathering dusk, her great eye looking solemnly across the plains to the far horizon, and her thoughts were the thoughts of woman.

Van Ruysler smiled when he saw the lad striding to meet him. He had no son of his own, and his heart warmed to him. Donald felt the exceeding kindness of the look with which he was regarded, and it made it more difficult to utter the words which were on his tongue.

"Well, Donald, nothing wrong, I hope?" said the colonist when he got within hearing. "Where's Julie? It isn't often you are apart."

"She is up at the house, sir. I came out because I wanted to say something to you alone."

"All right, boy," said the colonist. "Say on."

"I wanted to say that I think I've been here long enough, and that I'd better be going away."

Van Ruysler leaped from his horse, fastened up his reins, and bade the obedient and intelligent animal go home, which it immediately did. Then he took a few steps by the lad's side in silence.

"But why? Don't you like the life at Ruysfontein? You might ride farther and fare worse; you can take an old settler's word for that."

"I know it well, sir, and that is why I think it time I was going now. Every day will make it harder——"

"That's so, Donald. Then you like the place and its folks?"

"Yes, sir, I do," the lad answered without hesitation.

Van Ruysler hesitated a moment, seeking fitting words to express what he felt. Again his heart warmed to the lad, who was so simple and sincere and so courteously respectful always. There were few words more pleasant in Van Ruysler's ears than the simple "sir" uttered by Donald Orde.

"Listen to me, lad. I'm not a man of great speech, but when I speak I mean what I say."

"I know that," replied Donald. "I have seen it again and again."

"Well, then, I wish you to stay. There is work in Ruysfontein for you and a dozen like you. Business calls me away more and more, and for longer periods. I am never without anxiety in my absence about Julie and her mother. This is a lawless place, and we often forget that we are really in the heart of a savage land until one fine day something terrible happens, and we wonder at our own blind confidence."

"Do you ever have a native rising like what

happens in India ? ” asked Donald with consuming interest.

“ Sometimes. I hear on good authority now that the Impis are arming in the hills. These people have many wrongs, both real and fancied ; and all their thoughts are of revenge. Ruysfontein is very isolated, and the Kaffirs are not to be depended on. After all, the racial instinct and sympathy is stronger than the bond of gratitude or service to an alien. A man’s womankind is never really safe, and he knows it. Now, if you will stay, I should never know a moment’s anxiety in my absence.”

“ But on what footing, sir ? ” he asked anxiously. “ I must have my work set for me, and then I can do it.”

“ All right, young fire-eater, what a fierce Northern pride burns in that heart of yours ! But I like you for it. You would be my deputy, my overseer—call it by any name you like, your work to keep the whole affair in going order. A big responsibility, eh ? But it is big things that make men, and you are fit for it, very fit.”

“ It is very kind,” began Donald ; but he was at once interrupted.

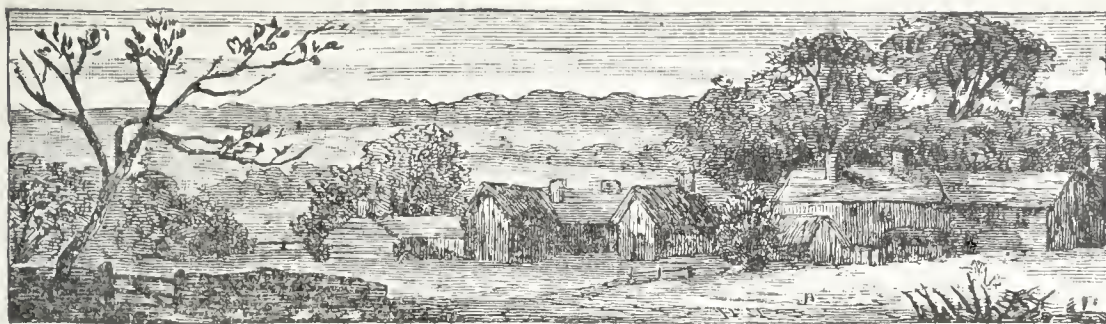
“ I don’t exactly see where the kindness comes in, unless it be on your side. It is not every day a man has the chance of getting the service of a fine, strong, capable fellow like you, and a gentleman, every inch of him, from top to toe.”

Donald flushed at this rare and unexpected praise.

“ They didn’t think much of me in my own Glen, sir,” he said with a slight, tremulous smile. “ They called me the Ne’er-do-Weel from Garrows to Dalnaspidal.”

"What they thought is no concern of mine. I prefer to trust my own eyes and judgment. Well, will you stay? We can talk the terms over later, but I'll make it worth your while."

"Yes," answered Donald simply, "I will stay."



CHAPTER IX.

AFTER THREE YEARS.



AFTER that day Donald Orde took his position as a member of the family at Ruysfontein, and became like a son of the house.

Van Ruysler's interest in the diamond mines and in the undertakings of the various companies with which he was associated took him more and more away from the farm, and Donald fell very naturally into the place of overseer in his absence. Of course, he did not become skilful or proficient in his new employment all at once. Farming among the Inverness-shire hills and farming on South African plains are two very different occupations ; but he was a sharp lad and adaptive by nature, and very soon managed to get a pretty tolerable knowledge of the men and things with whom he had to deal. He was greatly interested in the Kaffir workpeople on the estate, and took an immense deal of trouble to understand them, and to consider them, in a way which was quite unknown in the district, where the Kaffir was considered merely as a beast of burden, rather lazier and more troublesome than the other animals necessary for the working of the farm,

Van Ruysler was an extensive stock-breeder and stock-raiser, work to which Donald Orde took very kindly, although he had everything to learn concerning their management. He was very happy in the house : madam loved and treated him as a son. Indeed, she often said it was impossible to do otherwise, he was so tender and considerate to her always, considering it no hardship to sit by her couch and read or talk to her, even in her most trying moods. She sang his praises so constantly in her husband's ears that Van Ruysler often congratulated himself on his good fortune in securing such a valuable inmate of his home and his own shrewdness in having discovered the fine qualities of Donald Orde. His relations with Julie were fairly satisfactory. They were like brother and sister—at least Donald's attitude towards her was entirely brotherly. Perhaps Julie herself sometimes wished him less matter-of-fact and undemonstrative.

So a couple of years rolled quickly and uneventfully away, Van Ruysler continuing to amass the wealth which it was impossible he could spend, and Donald Orde to fill a responsible and valued position at the farm. He wrote many letters to the Glen, but the months rolled by, and no answer coming to them he concluded that he was forgotten in the old home. Julie often spoke of far-off Scotland and tried to tease him about Fiona, but received so little encouragement that by-and-by she also ceased to make any allusion to the past. She believed that memory was growing dim in Donald's heart, not knowing that those who keep silence have many deep thoughts in their heart lying upon them like a great flood.

At the end of the second year Van Ruysler with his wife and daughter set sail for Europe, and were

absent rather longer than twelve months. It had become necessary, if madam's life was to be prolonged, that some surgical advice and skill should be sought, and they proposed to sail directly for London, their subsequent movements depending very much on the verdict of the surgeons there.

Donald was quite happy in their absence, busying himself with the work of the farm, attending to the details day by day faithfully as if they had been his own. The man who has plenty of occupation and who enjoys that Heaven-born gift, a capacity for work and strength to do it, need never be unhappy, or have any fault to find with Fate.

Donald Orde often looked back upon that year of absolute loneliness on the African farm, thinking that it had taught him endurance and given him that strength which was needful for the stress of later years.

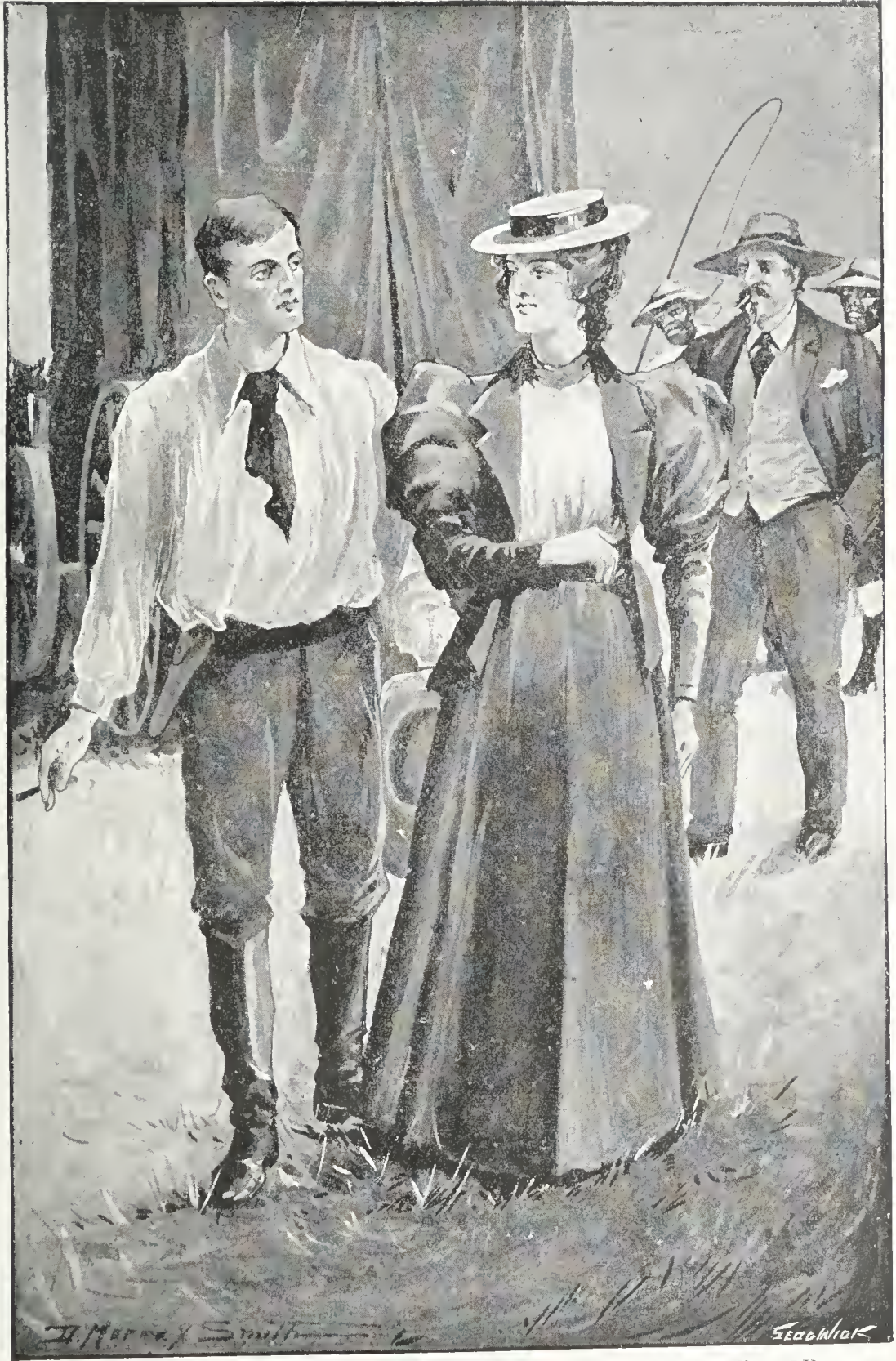
He was sitting alone on the verandah on the evening when the wanderers were expected back to the farm. Three years of exile had done their work on Donald Orde : the boy had become a man—a fine, well-built, noble fellow, with the same frank, honest, kindly face, which the fierce African sun had bronzed not unbecomingly. He carried his tall figure with an easy grace, and looked like one who had pride in himself and who had confidence given by an assured position in life. He was smoking one of the fine cigars which was a luxury always obtainable in that lavish household ; but the flavour was not so soothing as usual, or some inner excitement prevented him from enjoying it to the full. He had a book on his knee also, and the Cape paper lay on the ground at his feet ; but presently across the long lonely reaches of the sandy plains his keen, unerring vision detected

the dark outline of the bullock waggon, and he got up from his chair with a smothered exclamation,—

“By Jove! there they are at last, and I’m as nervous as a kitten. Couldn’t feel worse if I had been playing the deuce with everything in Van Ruysler’s absence.”

He stepped within the open door of the house and took a glance round the dining-room, which was set for the evening meal, and then he ran upstairs to make sure that madam’s sitting-room was arranged as it would best please her. She had been a mother to him in the land of his adoption, and he repaid her with an absolute devotion and tender consideration which it is the lot of few mothers to receive from their sons. By the time he had made this inspection the outline of the bullock waggon had become more clear and distinct, and he could see the team of oxen patiently ploughing their way across the sand at a pace which seemed to express their joy at being within sight of home. He heard the din increasing among the Kaffirs in the village, and guessed that they were turning out *en masse* to welcome the wanderers home.

Feeling that he could not bear to meet them in a crowd he ascended the little kopje behind the house, and then rapidly crossing the little paddock stepped out with long, swinging strides to meet them. As he approached the waggon a kind of chill, unspoken dread seemed to lay hold of his heart. There appeared to be no joyous excitement among the occupants of the waggon, nor were they looking out as they came within sight of home. As he came nearer, however, he saw Van Ruysler alight and answer to his salutation with a wave of his hand. He was too far distant yet



“‘IT’S VERY PLEASANT TO SEE YOU AGAIN,’ SHE SAID.” [Page 75.]

to see the expression of his face, and when they did meet it was sufficient to tell him that something terrible had happened. They wrung each other's hands in silence. Donald feared to put into words the questions which trembled on his lips.

"Here we are, my boy," said Van Ruysler brokenly. "Julie is in the waggon. She and I have come back alone."

"Alone," repeated Donald blankly. "What has happened to madam?"

"She has left us, Donald. She died at sea, just after we left the coast of Spain. I did not cable, because I thought you would learn the sad news soon enough. Julie was asleep a little while ago, and I did not wake her. It will be a sad home-coming for her, poor girl."

"I'm awake, papa," she said presently from the interior of the waggon. And without waiting for assistance she sprang lightly to the ground and held out her hand to Donald.

"How are you? It's very pleasant to see you again," she said rather primly.

Donald took her hand a trifle awkwardly. This was not the Julie of old: before she had gone away it would have been the most natural thing in the world that she should throw her arms round his neck and kiss him. Indeed, she had done so many a time. But this stately young woman, attired in the very latest fashion of travelling garb, and wearing her hair in a new and startling style, seemed to keep him at a most respectful distance. And yet how lovely she was! Man-like he could not help being struck by her radiant beauty, which neither grief nor travel-stain had been able to dim.

When she had thus greeted him, she looked across to the homestead with its surrounding cluster of sheep kraals and Kaffir huts, and it seemed to Donald that her lip curled in ineffable disdain. "What change has one short year wrought!" was his passionate thought, and it was a relief to turn once more to Van Ruysler's kind face, which, however, was changed also, for grief and anxiety had left their trace there, and it seemed to Donald that he had come back an old, old man. His own heart was too full for speech, and he made no attempt to utter a word of condolence or of sympathy; but the grip of his hand had said all that was necessary, and in some dim, strange fashion Van Ruysler felt himself comforted, and the world seemed less dark to him than it had done an hour ago.

So they went sorrowfully and without speaking towards the house which the missing presence had once blessed, and where the smile which they had lost for ever had been wont to make sunshine for them all.

They met at dinner, and the talk was of indifferent matters connected with their travel. Directly it was over Van Ruysler left the house. Donald guessed from his demeanour and expression that he could no longer bear even the company of those dearest to him, and that he must meet and conquer the desolation of his home-coming in the silence alone.

"It is all so sickening to come back here," said Julie petulantly, the moment the door was closed. "I have looked forward since I was a child to going to Europe, and now I wish I had stayed. I am afraid life will be impossible to me here now."

"Why?" he asked stupidly, feeling that everything had gone wrong.

"I wonder you need to ask, who have so recently

come from Europe. I want to go back there to that great, wonderful London, and be a power in it. I saw something of society and the women there, and I should not be afraid to hold my own among them."

"I have no doubt you will have your opportunity, then," said Donald quietly. "You have only to tell your father. There is nothing on earth he will not do or get for you."

"Mamma and I had it all planned, but now it is all different. You can see for yourself that papa is a crushed and broken man. I feel very much for him, of course, but I do think that he has been selfish in his grief."

"Hush!" said Donald, and a harsher note broke into the former gentleness of his tone. "It is a grief you cannot understand. You might at least be tender with it."

"I see that you are as good at rebuking me as you used to be. But I will not accept it all so meekly now. I have been accustomed to rather different treatment from those of your countrymen I have met. They are more respectful to Miss Van Ruysler than you have ever been."

Donald smiled, not taking her words seriously.

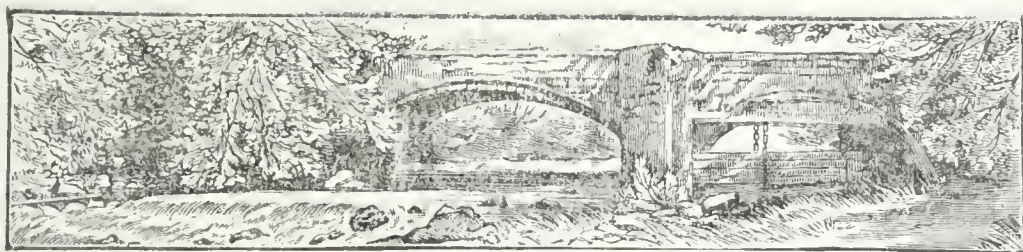
"Did you snub them, then, as you used to snub the Durban boys, and with the same results?"

"I shall not tell you anything if you speak in that rude way," she answered coldly. "I shall never be able to look at the Durban boys, as you call them, since I have sat by an English duke at dinner and lived in an English country house among lords and ladies."

"So much the worse—or better, is it?—for the Durban boys," said Donald, much amused.

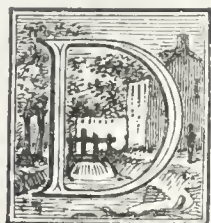
“You have become a heathen without manners, living here alone,” she said, after a pause. Then she looked at him with a curious drooping of her heavy white eyelids, and added suddenly,—

“Well, I saw your Glen and your Fiona!”



CHAPTER X.

A CREATURE OF MOODS.



DONALD sprang to his feet, and the red blood dyed his cheeks.

"You saw Fiona," he repeated stupidly.

"Fiona and the Glen; I don't believe it."

"It is true," she answered with a mocking smile. "We left mamma in Edinburgh, and went together, papa and I. Heavens! what a journey it was, and the rain of which you told me was sweeping over those terrible moors as we drove up. I shall never forget it. I wonder how people can live in such a place."

"Where did you see Fiona?" he asked almost rudely. "Did you go to the house?"

"No, we did not. We stopped down in the village and talked with some of the people there. Then we saw the clergyman, who told us everything we wanted to know."

"And how are they?" asked Donald. "My uncle and aunt, and all at Garrows. Did Mr. M'Donald give you any news of them?"

"Oh yes, he told us a great deal. That your aunt is very ill and never able to be out. And they told us in the village too, at the blacksmith's shop, that

your uncle had never held up his head since you left. As for your Fiona, she has quickly consoled herself."

"How?" asked Donald, almost fiercely.

"Oh, she is to be married, they say, to a man with an impossible name. I have forgotten it, not that I ever could pronounce it; but perhaps if you were to say it I should know if it was the right one."

"Hamish Chisholme of Ruglas?"

"That's it," she said, with a provoking smile. "They are to be married very soon, we are told, and everybody seems to approve of it highly. They have not taken long to forget you in the Glen."

"Did they not speak kindly of me?" Donald asked, with a kind of wistfulness in his voice. "Shan M'Dougall, I mean, and Mr. M'Donald."

"Oh yes; they asked after you most particularly. I was thinking of your own relatives. Then as we drove down we met a great high dogcart driving up the Glen, and our coachman told us that the lady in it was Miss Forbes of Garrows. You may be sure I looked at her well, but I could see little of her except a pair of big eyes staring out under a waterproof hood. Where do they get their clothes made in your Glen? I suppose they have a fashion all their own. But she took a good look at me, and I should think she would know me again."

There was silence between them a moment then, and Donald turned away so that the girl with the dusky, mocking eyes might not see the yearning in his face, for her words had stirred in him all the woe of the exile, and he longed for the wings of a bird that he might fly from these burning plains to the cool, misty shades of the Glen, where dwelt those whom his soul loved.

She bore the silence a few moments, and then a strange change seemed to sweep over her face also. Then she rose suddenly, and crossing swiftly to his side, folded her slender hands on his arm.

"I see you are heart-broken for that terrible far-away Glen, Donald," she said, in a tender whisper. "I am afraid I have been cruel to you, but oh ! I understand it too. Let me share your pain, and comfort you if I can."

It was impossible not to be moved by her words. The change from the cold, cynical, mocking tone was so great as to be almost overwhelming. Donald had been less than a man to feel the clinging of those delicate hands, to hear the thrill in her passionate voice and to see the light in her glorious eyes, without some answering passion in his heart.

"I am a fool to be so vexed, Julie," he said, but almost roughly. "Still, it's hard on a man to hear that he is so soon forgotten."

"Yes, I know," she answered, with the same tender tone in her voice. "That is the way all the world over ; but you need not care. Can't your new friends love you as well as the old ?"

"It is not that," he said quickly. "But tell me what has come to you, Julie. One moment you are as cold as ice, stabbing a fellow to the heart with your bitter words, the next moment you are like this. Which is the real Julie ?"

"Perhaps both are real," she said, letting her hands drop from his arm with a half-sigh. "But there's no use hiding the truth from you. I was madly, fiercely jealous of your devotion to your Glen and to those in it, and I must own that it pleased me to hear that they were not so loyal and devoted as you dreamed."

"I didn't think they would have forgotten me so soon. I could have staked my life on Fiona," uttering her name spontaneously for the first time in Julie's hearing.

"Ah, well, you see it's not wise to trust too much, and the man on the spot always has the advantage," she said, with one of her shrewd, worldly flashes.

"Then I ought to have a great advantage here," he said teasingly, and without taking serious thought of his words. In the dusky light he saw the colour mount swift and high to the girl's cheek, and for the first time during the years of their intimate friendship a sense of restraint and consciousness crept upon them, and each became aware of the barrier which had arisen between them. Donald at least resented it fiercely.

"We are talking like idiots, Julie," he said roughly. "Why can't we be as we used to be, chums and jolly good comrades? I don't see that a year should make such a confounded difference."

"It's you that are imagining the difference," she said. "I wish that you would come and sit down here, Donald, and let us talk about papa. What are we to do with him?"

Glad of this happy change in the subject of their talk, Donald stepped over to the open verandah window, and leaning up against it prepared himself for serious talk.

While she waited for him to speak, her thought was that in all her travels, and she had travelled far, among all the men she had met, and she had met many during the last twelve months, she had seen none to compare with Donald Orde, and as she looked upon his bronzed, handsome face, composed just then into a tender seriousness—his heart being full of the

man who had so generously befriended him—her own heart beat with a hungry, passionate pain because her woman's intuition told her that he was cold to her, and that memory was still faithful to the maiden of his boyhood's dream.

"Do you believe there is a God?" she asked suddenly; and he lifted his eyes to her face, startled anew by her question.

"Yes, I do," he answered. "But why this strange question?"

"Well, I have puzzled over these things very much of late. We read in the Bible, of course, that He is a tender and loving God; why then should He have taken mamma away? She was necessary to papa and to me. There has never been anything like the devotion which papa has lavished on her all his life. It will be simply impossible for him to exist without her."

"Others have done it," said Donald gravely, "but it will be very hard."

"It will be impossible, I tell you," she said with a little stamp of her foot. "I know him ten thousand times better than you; he will not live long after her, you take my word for it."

"Oh, you are letting your imagination run away with you, Julie," Donald said quickly. "Time is a wonderful healer."

"That is what every one says, and it is horrible, horrible, I think," she said passionately. "They think it comforts those who have lost one they love very much to be told that soon they will forget and not care. Do you see anything cruel or bitter in that? But then you are so cold-blooded in the North, you feel nothing."

"We feel, but we don't talk so much," observed Donald drily. "And when one speaks of time healing a bitter wound, it does not necessarily mean that it is entirely forgotten. You have not learnt to be more reasonable since you went away, Julie."

"Oh, I suppose not. I am everything that is horrid in your estimation. I have always known that, and I wonder that you take the trouble to speak to me at all."

"Now you are childish," he said sternly. "What's the use of going on like this, Julie? We can't afford to be hitting out at each other like this. What we have got to do is to lay our heads together and see how we can best make up to your father for what he has lost."

All the answer she gave him was to burst into a fit of passionate sobbing and run from the room. Donald was not much upset by this final touch to the strain of the last half-hour. He attributed her varying moods to the tension of the last weeks, and while she was sobbing her heart out on her bed he walked coolly out into the paddock, lit his cigar, and went in search of Van Ruysler. He found him, as he expected, sitting under the boulder on the kopje behind the farmhouse—a solitary, motionless figure, with his arms folded across his chest, his eyes looking across the great desert of the plains, in whose wildness and solitariness he seemed to find some strange kinship in his hour of desolation.

"May I sit down beside you, sir?" asked Donald with that respectful tenderness in which he never failed. "If I intrude I will not stay, but I can't bear to leave you here any longer."

"I'm glad to see you, boy. Sit down," said Van

Ruysler. "I was just facing the thing. It's a reality now. Would you have thought that a woman like my wife, who spent her days upon the sofa and took so little concern with the everyday affairs, could leave such a terrible blank in a man's life?"

"Yes, sir, I think I understand it quite well," answered Donald. "The very helplessness of madam's condition created a kind of atmosphere different from any other. Her place, like her dear influence, was unique. It will never be filled."

"Ah! I see you enter into it. You have a wonderful perception for a lad of your years," said Van Ruysler. "Well, I suppose I shall have to take the thing up again and go on as best I can. Julie and you will be a comfort to me."

"What's the matter with her?" asked Donald bluntly. "She seems quite changed."

"I have noticed it, I must say. It is a change easily accounted for—she is a woman. I'm rather anxious about her sometimes. She is one who will need very careful handling, Donald. She will make paradise or pandemonium for the man she marries. There will be no middle course for her."

"Oh, she's too young to talk or think of marrying for years yet," said Donald lightly.

"You forget she is twenty-one," answered Van Ruysler. "How old are you?"

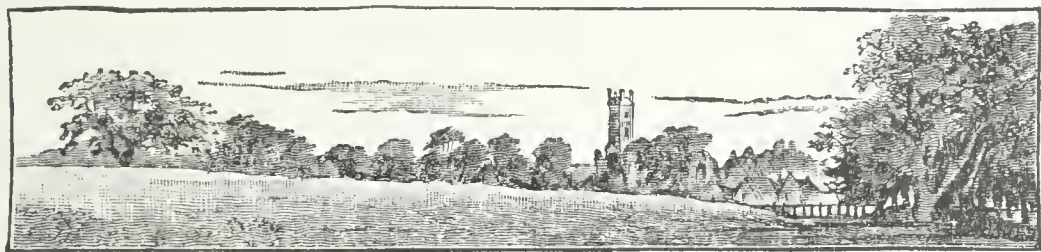
"Just the same age," answered Donald.

"Well, you'd pass for five-and-twenty," said Van Ruysler, "and Julie looks her age, I think, and more."

Then somehow an odd silence fell upon them, and Donald Orde divined by some unerring instinct what were Van Ruysler's thoughts.

For the first time in his remembrance he tossed

uneasily on his bed that night, unable to sleep, his mind full of troubled dreams of the future, in which Julie Van Ruysler and Fiona were strangely intermingled. Also for many days after he was haunted by the feeling that certain chains were being forged about him, and that he was hemmed in by a destiny, in which the Glen of his boyhood and his love had no part. Ah me! how far away it seemed, and yet how near and precious! There were moments when his new home, with its tropical luxury, its cloudless skies and perpetual sunshine, was hateful to him, and he longed for one wild sweep of the north wind from Craighbhan down the Glen. But not yet.



CHAPTER XI.

SERVANT OR SON ?



FROM that day Van Ruysler was a changed man. It seemed to Donald as he watched him with the keen interest born of a strong affection that he had set a limit to his life, and that he began to set his house in order, as one preparing for the long and final journey.

"I'm getting the thing wound up by degrees, Donald," he said one day. "I'm realising everything. Would it surprise you very much to know that I'm a millionaire?"

"I haven't thought about it, sir," answered Donald, "but everybody knows you are immensely wealthy."

"I did not know I was worth so much. Julie will be one of the great heiresses of the Colony. I believe I've done wrong keeping her up here so long."

"She is very happy, and would rather be here than anywhere. But it is not too late yet. Why not sell out entirely and go and make your home in England?"

Van Ruysler shook his head.

"It wouldn't suit me, boy. When a man has got used to this sort of thing," he said, with a wave of his hand across the rolling veldt, "he can't be cramped in

cities. I'll span out to my limit in Ruysfontein. It's good enough for me——"

"Or for anybody," said Donald, with an expressive glance at the living green of the immense plains outspread around them. It was early summer time, and the veldt was as green as a Devonshire lane.

"You have settled down pretty easily to the life, lad," said Van Ruysler, looking at him with a keen, affectionate glance. "How would you like it for good?"

"I shouldn't complain," answered Donald; but there was a faint shadow of restraint in his voice which Van Ruysler was quick to understand.

"Well, whether you stop or not, I shall not forget all you have done for me," he replied significantly. "I must say it would ease my mind if I saw some prospect of my girl settling down with a good husband of her own——"

"Raalte is very devoted," said Donald quickly. "Would you not be disposed to regard him favourably?"

Van Ruysler shrugged his shoulders. "As well seek to mate the eagle with a common barnyard fowl," he answered with some bitterness, for Donald's answer did not please him.

"But why this haste?" asked Donald. "Julie is only twenty-two, and she is quite happy as she is."

"It is very well as it is, lad, but time goes and I with it. A woman child as she is, left among these wastes would be a pitiful sight."

"But she would not stay here. Her fortune would enable her to choose any abiding place."

"It will also make her a prey for all the scum of

the earth. The lust of gold burns more feverishly in men's veins than it did when I was young. Even Raalte, of whom you spoke, has a long eye after the main chance and would not be so fond of my little girl if he did not know a good deal more than I like about my investments."

"But why worry yourself about all this? Just leave things, sir. They generally straighten themselves up in the end."

"Ah yes—well, perhaps—but hark, boy, you know what Julie is. Marrying will be heaven or hell for her—there are depths in her nature we have never sounded, but they are there. I have often wished her, especially since her mother's death, more ordinary and commonplace."

Donald was silent, for he could not contradict; nay, he knew that every word Van Ruysler spoke was true. He felt, however, the extreme awkwardness of the moment; there was a dread in his mind which he could hardly put into words.

"There's somebody riding as if for dear life, sir," he said suddenly, pointing to where a horseman made a black moving speck in the wide greenness of the veldt.

Van Ruysler turned his head carelessly, not interested beyond the passing moment.

"Looks like Doort," he said shortly. "He's always after some mare's nest. Well, Donald, to return to the subject. Is there any reason why you and Julie should not make a match of it? It would please me well—beyond anything that could happen in this world."

Up rose the flush high and red to Donald's sunburnt cheek.

"Sir, you do me too much honour," he said in an embarrassed voice. "Don't let us forget that Julie is the person to be consulted and considered——"

"I don't forget it—I am only saying that if it happened that you two could think of each other in that way, there would be few happier men than Jan Van Ruysler. You might do worse, Donald. Though she is my own I have never seen her peer, even among your Northern women, whose beauty is famed all the world over."

"Sir, it is not that. She is perfect," said Donald, more embarrassed still. "And for that very reason she is entitled to absolute choice among the flower of manhood. I am nobody. I work here for my daily bread—proud to be your servant, because you have never treated me as one—but your servant all the same."

"My servant!" repeated Van Ruysler, and his heavy lip curled slightly. "I don't like the word, Donald, between you and me. You are my son, or nothing. Well, we may leave the subject. We don't seem likely to agree. But you can keep it in your mind if you like. Yes, it is Doort," he added, shading his eyes with his hands, "and a devil of a hurry he seems to be in. Looks as if something had happened at the out-station. Let's go and meet him."

By the time they had reached the road outside the kraals, Doort, a fat little Boer who acted as Van Ruysler's overseer at a distant part of his great estate, had urged his foam-covered beast into the enclosure, where it was immediately surrounded by a crowd of open-mouthed Kaffirs, eager as children to hear what news he brought. But he simply gave them his horse in charge, and, wiping his purple face with his huge

bandana, waddled out to meet Van Ruysler, who surveyed him with a grim smile.

"Hulloa, Doort, what terrible catastrophe have you come to report this time—the slaughter of a thousand head at least?"

"It's all very well to poke fun at me, mynheer," said Doort in an aggrieved voice. "But of course if you don't care it's nothing to me——"

"What's up, then? Don't waste time——"

"Well, Molotsi's been at his tricks again. Thirteen head on Wednesday night, and ten last night, and never a trace of them. It's time something was done to stop his villainy and tan his black hide for him—or he'll get bold one day and sweep down on the whole station."

"I believe you're right, Doort," replied Van Ruysler gravely, yet with an absent manner which betrayed a languid interest. "The best way will be to send to Durban for the police."

"I came myself," continued Doort, still aggrieved because his tale was so indifferently received. "Afraid to trust any of the boys—but if it is so little to you, mynheer, why, it's nothing to me."

"Don't get crusty, Doort. Everybody can't make a fuss," answered Van Ruysler good-humouredly. "I am much obliged to you all the same, and I'll take immediate measures to put a spoke in our friend Molotsi's wheel. Well, Donald, what do you say? Will you ride into Durban and ask Naylor to send me out a couple of men to put the fear of death on the marauder?"

"Yes, and I hope if we get them you'll let me ride out with them to Hofspplaats," said Donald eagerly.

"We'll see—you'll come back this way anyhow."

You had better start now. You will reach Muller's about midnight, where you can sleep. We should see you back with your men on Saturday."

"Easily, I should say—if Naylor's decent about it at all, and I'm not afraid," said Donald. "Well, I'll go to the house and get into my riding togs."

"Do, and you'd better take Pippin. He'll stand the strain better than any beast in the stable."

Now, this was a mark of special favour—Pippin being Van Ruysler's own thoroughbred, whom he allowed no man but himself to mount. He was a splendid creature, and Donald's spirits rose at the prospect of his glorious gallop over the veldt; he whistled gaily as he approached the house. Julie was sitting in a lounge chair on the verandah, her yellow gown making a patch of exquisite colour against the vivid greenness of the creepers. The English mail had just come in, and she was surrounded by books and papers and packages of various kinds.

"Nothing for you, Don. I see that stupid little Doort has arrived. What's happened now?"

"Oh, a bigger raid than usual upon the cattle. Your father thinks he had better get some official authority to put a stop to Molotsi's little game, so I'm off to Durban for the police."

"To Durban! and how long will you be gone?"

"He thinks we'll get back by Saturday if they don't delay, but I'm sure Naylor will attend immediately to any message from Ruysfontein."

"He ought to. And will anybody go out from here with the police?"

"Yes, half a dozen or so, and we'll get all Doort's boys. It will be rather lively for Mr. Molotsi."

"We," she repeated significantly. "Will you go on the expedition?"

"If I'm allowed, and I think I will be."

"Perhaps father would take me, too. I've never been to Hofsplaats."

"It's twenty hours' ride, Julie."

"That's nothing. Yes, I'll go. I've made up my mind—unless you seriously object, as you generally do to anything I have set my heart on."

Donald flushed.

"That's not fair, Julie—but it isn't the sort of thing a girl would enjoy. Besides, it isn't safe. These black fellows are never to be trusted."

"That's just why I should enjoy it. I'm tired of this quiet life, and I'm going on that expedition, Don, you may take my word for it."

She flashed a mischievous glance at him, and in that saucy mood she was a truly adorable creature.

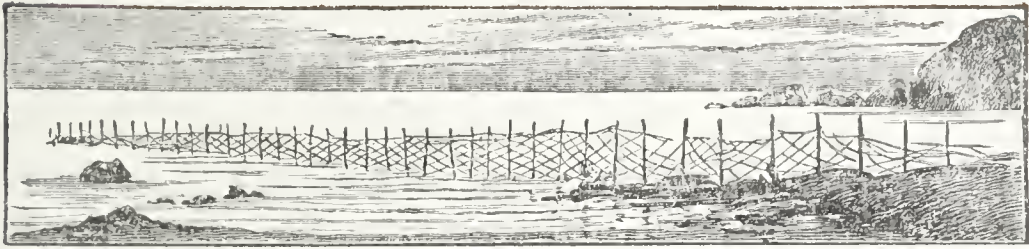
"You have a way of getting what you like, Julie," he said teasingly. "And if you put it on to your father like that, we may reckon you as one of the party."

"You may," she said with a nod, and a slight compression of her full red lips. "As to getting my own way in everything that's all you know about it. But I certainly mean to have my way in this. If you have your choice in Durban, be sure and bring that handsome Captain Batchelor with you. It would make the ride a lot more enjoyable to me."

"All right. I'll convey your commands to Captain Batchelor, and I'm sure he will beg on his bended knees for the privilege of leading the expedition," he answered in the same bantering tone, as he passed into the house. When he was out of sight her gay mood

fled, and leaning her elbow on her knee she looked away across the clustering roofs of the kraals to the far horizon, her face grave to sadness.

“I have a way of getting all I want, have I?” she repeated almost bitterly. “That’s all you know of it, Donald Orde.”



CHAPTER XII.

ON A BORDER RAID.



LATE on Saturday night Donald rode into Ruysfontein with Captain Batchelor and a couple of privates in the border police. Julie had gone to bed when she heard the clatter of their horses' hoofs, and immediately the slight drowsiness which had been stealing over her disappeared. She sprang up, her one fear lest they should saddle up fresh nags and start on the expedition without her, though her father, able to deny her nothing, had promised that she should make one of the exploring party. As she hurriedly dressed she heard the hum of voices in the dining-room, which was directly below—indicating either that they were waiting some refreshments or enjoying a late pipe before turning in for the night. She made her toilet quickly, but with considerable care. The morning gown she threw on was loose and comfortable, but it was cut with style and finish, and had none of the untidy features of the usual *robe de chambre*. Her hair, always defying all efforts to confine it within conventional limits, made a bright and fitting frame to the beautiful face flushed with excitement.

She paused on the stairs several times and hesitated quite a minute at the dining-room door, but her great anxiety at last gave her courage and she walked boldly in. As she did so the clock on the stairs struck one.

The house steward had taken charge of the troopers in his own quarters, and Captain Batchelor was the only stranger in the room. All three started in amazement at the apparition in white, and Batchelor, who had cherished an unbounded admiration for the beautiful heiress of Ruysfontein since he had met her at one of the Durban balls, sprang to his feet, bowing low.

"Bless me, Julie," exclaimed Van Ruysler. "What on earth do you mean? Do you know what o'clock it is, girl?"

"Yes, father. I came down to make sure you didn't start without me. How do you do, Captain Batchelor? I am sure you are tired after your long ride."

"It was worth it for this pleasure, Miss Van Ruysler," replied Batchelor, who was nothing if not gallant and impressive in his demeanour towards ladies. Donald Orde, whose own manner was always characterised by his native bluntness, looked on at this little scene in considerable amazement, but did not open his mouth.

"There's spirit for you, Batchelor," said Van Ruysler, with a fond, proud glance at her. "This chit actually wants to ride with us on our expedition. Would you advise it?"

"For our sake, certainly, if not for hers," replied the Captain gallantly. "The only fear I have is that Miss Van Ruysler may be put to some in-

convenience, though I don't think there would be any risk."

"I should think not," said Julie quickly. "And I'm not afraid even if there were risk. I should enjoy it; and I suppose Doort's wife could make things a little comfortable for me. He has a wife, hasn't he, papa?"

"Yes, but judging from what I saw last time I was at the out-station, I shouldn't be too much set on the comfort likely to be obtained. But there, if you are willing to rough it, we'll say no more about it. If Captain Batchelor has no objections, I needn't make any."

"Are you going to-night?" she asked.

"No. These fellows must have a rest, to say nothing of their horses. Doort has gone back, and will have everything in readiness for us. We'll start to-morrow at sundown. Are you prepared to camp out if necessary, Julie?"

"Oh, yes; I shall love it. I'm really very much obliged to Molotsi for affording me this treat. You know, papa, the cattle are not of much value; you never miss them."

She flashed a mischievous glance at her father's face as she uttered these words, to which Van Ruysler replied with a huge laugh.

"Hear her, Batchelor. Not much Dutch thrift or foresight there. That's what we get from the rising generation. Well, well, off you go to bed, child, and don't hurry us up in the morning. These lads will be the better of a long spell of rest."

Julie could very well have sat down and chatted with Batchelor. She had sufficient of the coquette in her nature to enjoy the undisguised admiration

expressed in his handsome eyes. She had last seen him in regulation full dress in the Governor's ball-room at Durban, but she preferred his present picturesque attire, which was certainly more fitted for the work he had to do.

"You must tell me all about the Durban beauties to-morrow, Captain Batchelor," she said. "I hope you will have a comfortable night, and rise refreshed for the great undertaking."

She gave him her hand cordially, kissed her father, and nodded with studied carelessness to Donald. Her sudden and unexpected appearance, however, had the effect of interrupting the flow of their talk, and finding it difficult to take up the thread again they bade each other good-night and retired to rest.

In the cool of the following evening the little cavalcade started out from Ruysfontein. It consisted of the three men who had come from Durban, Donald Orde, Van Ruysler and his daughter, and Jan Groot, Van Ruysler's own man, who was his faithful shadow, refusing to be parted from him even for a moment.

Van Ruysler had rescued him, a poor and friendless Boer boy, from the cruel bondage of service to a small farmer of the lowest Boer type, who, with his wife, had delighted to heap the worst ill-usage upon the hapless creature whom chance had thrown into their power. He had now been in Van Ruysler's service for nearly twelve years, and would cheerfully have laid down his life for him.

Julie Van Ruysler—an attractive figure at any time—perhaps looked her best on horseback. She had ridden since she was a toddling creature and had to be held on her pony's broad back, now she sat erect as a stately young tree, and held herself with matchless

grace. She was very particular about her habit, and had indeed designed one for her own use, which, while losing nothing of becomingness, was safer than the ordinary ladies' habit.

As they rode Donald Orde was much amused at the little by-play between her and Batchelor, who was evidently so struck that he had eyes and ears for nothing but her.

She treated Donald with a studied coldness, and exercised all her powers of attraction to turn the gallant captain's head. Donald himself would have much preferred that she had been left at home ; and when Doort saw the little cavalcade riding rapidly, half a dozen abreast, to his kraal, he threw up his fat hands in horror and ran in to his wife.

"Here they are, Wilhelmina, and, Lord love us, mynheer has brought his daughter. That shows that he will treat the whole matter as a little joke. Why, then, should we trouble ourselves?"

Madame Doort seldom troubled herself about anything ; she simply rested her hands on her capacious sides and said indifferently,—

"I have always told you, Doort, that you lay things too much to heart. What are a few head of cattle to mynheer? Nothing but the dust beneath his feet."

Even when the whole party arrived at the little homestead the phlegmatic Dutchwoman did not betray the slightest interest or anxiety to bid them welcome. A few imperative words, however, from Van Ruysler soon caused her to bestir herself, and she conducted Julie with considerable deference to the best room in the house, which was half bed-half sitting-room, furnished in a quaint style which

recalled the Dutch village houses of long ago. Then she waddled, grumbling all the time, to prepare an evening meal for the travellers, and directly it was eaten they went out to make preparations to start on the further expedition which was to bring them to the village where Molotsi reigned as chief, and where the missing cattle were supposed to be.

Doort talked volubly all through the meal, bestowing upon them all the information he had gathered since his return from bearing the news to Ruysfontein. He had sent some of his boys (as he called his assistants on the station) to ascertain whether any fresh stock had been observed at any of the native stations in the neighbourhood. They had brought back the news that the cattle beyond doubt were concealed in Molotsi's village, otherwise they could not account for the unusual abundance and rejoicing that was going on there. They further had reported that the chief and his marauders were well armed, and that they were on the watch for attack from any side.

It was a very friendly country on the whole, but this particular chief was well known to bear a grudge against the Government for certain restrictions and limitations which had been insisted upon, and he lost no opportunity of harassing and annoying any of the white settlers within his reach. Indeed, he had become so bold and unscrupulous in his frequent attacks, and there had been so many complaints sent to headquarters from various parts of the district, that they had been more than ready to grant the help for which Van Ruysler had applied.

He listened to Doort's story with considerable uneasiness—not on his own account, however, for

he was an old settler, who in the early days had held his own against native opposition and had fought many a bloody fight with the border ruffians.

Julie, who was listening anxiously to everything that passed, instantly understood the cloud on her father's face.

"I know what you are thinking, papa," she called out in a clear, ringing voice, "that you will leave me behind to the tender mercies of Madame Doort. But all this only makes me the more anxious to go on. I won't stay behind, papa, so it's no use asking me."

Batchelor and Van Ruysler exchanged glances. The captain had much enjoyed the company of the fair rider when they had scoured the safer reaches of the veldt, but now that the real business of the expedition faced him, he was the first man to meet it in all seriousness.

"I think your father is right, Miss Van Ruysler," he said. "It will be much safer for you to remain here—in fact, I think, as an officer of the law, I must insist upon it."

"You needn't," said Julie calmly. "For unless I am shut up under lock and key I will come after you, and it would be much more satisfactory to let me come. I'm not afraid, and I could use a rifle, too, if it were necessary."

Van Ruysler shook his head and looked helplessly from one to the other. Finally, without making any further remark, he got up and left the house, at the same time beckoning to Donald to follow him.

"I wish you'd beg Julie for your sake to remain behind," he said, when they were out of hearing. "I

know what I'm talking about, and so does Batchelor. We might have a pretty sharp encounter—not the sort of thing a girl ought to be mixed up in at all.”

“Wouldn't you remain here with her, sir?” asked Donald anxiously. “If there's any risk it is important that you should escape it.”

“Is it?” Van Ruysler gave his shoulders a little shake. “The old fire stirs in me yet at the thought of a brush with these black ruffians. I bear Molotsi an old grudge and I shouldn't mind wiping it off. No, I must go, but I ask you to beg Julie as a favour to you to remain behind.”

Donald looked a trifle uncomfortable.

“I rather think that will be the very thing to make her the more determined to go,” he said at length. “She is not so very amenable to my advice.”

“Try her at least,” said Van Ruysler, “and try her well for my sake.”

It was not until they had gone out to saddle their horses again that Donald found an opportunity to speak to Julie alone.

“I wish you'd stay here, Julie,” he said bluntly, “for all our sakes, but especially for your father's. It's a very serious thought to him to have you exposed to the slightest danger, and there might be a good deal of danger in this skirmish, if they don't give up the cattle quietly.”

“I'm not afraid,” said Julie proudly. “Do you think I'm one of the sort who would scream or faint at the sight of blood? I might be useful, too. I have studied all sorts of things you don't know anything about, and I could bind up a wound with the best hospital nurse that was ever trained.”

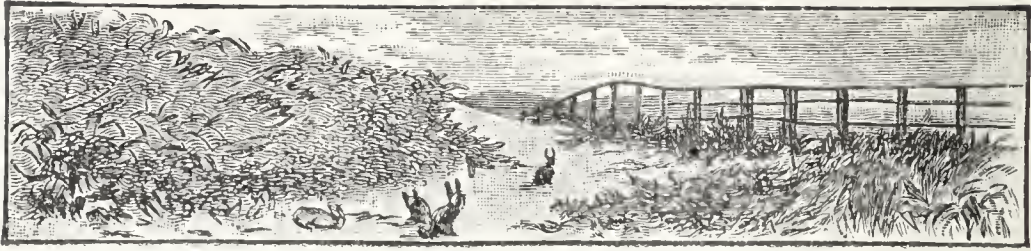
“We hope skill of that kind won't be required,”

answered Donald stoutly "Won't you stay, then, because we all beg you?"

"Is it anything to you, Donald?" was her next question.

"It is a great deal to me if you are in danger of any kind, Julie," he answered simply. "It is not much we ask; only that you will stay here for about twenty-four hours till we return. It will soon pass. There are many fathers who would simply forbid you to go; you should repay yours for his great indulgence."

"You are right; I did not think of that," she answered impulsively. "I am behaving like a fool. I'll stay behind."



CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT CAME OF IT.



IN the cool of the dawn the "invading army," as Julie called them, rode away from Hofspplaats. It was augmented by half a dozen of Van Ruysler's employés at the outpost, and a friendly bushman who undertook to show them the way to the raiders' village. Donald loved a spice of adventure, and his spirits rose with every mile they rode.

The country they had to traverse after leaving the borders of Van Ruysler's estate was wild, and in some parts more hilly than any part of South Africa Donald had yet seen. It occurred to him that any warfare, however slight, which took place in such a country must of necessity be entirely in favour of the natives, who knew all its peculiarities. About noon, when the sun was at its hottest, they came suddenly on a herd of hartebeests lazily enjoying the shelter of a clump of woodland near a spring. The excitement of Batchelor, who was a keen sportsman, became intense, and it was shared by most of the others. Donald had thus a chance for the first time of seeing big game potted on the veldt. The excitement of this pursuit delayed

them a couple of hours, and then they had to rest, for in the early afternoon it became impossible for man or beast to make the slightest exertion on these burning plains.

At five o'clock they were on the move again after coffee, alert and refreshed, and pushed on rapidly to their destination. They passed several small kraals on the way, and, though they made strict inquiry at each, were unable to find the slightest trace of the missing cattle.

About ten o'clock they came within sight of Molotsi's kraal, which was a considerable place for a South African village. They called a halt outside the bounds to consider what was to be done. The whole village was asleep, not a sound broke the stillness but the lowing from the cattle kraals and the distant cry of the jackals scenting afar the nearness of human beings.

"What are we to do now?" asked Van Ruysler. "Rouse Molotsi, I suppose, and demand in the Queen's name the restoration of my property."

"We could do that, certainly," said Batchelor. "It would be the most expeditious way of ending the business, but it might amuse the boys to have a little fun at Molotsi's expense. Suppose we make a raid on the cattle kraals and steal our own beasts."

At this suggestion the boys audibly chuckled, and began fumbling at their rifles.

"We'll need to look pretty spry," said Batchelor, "and each man keep his own look-out, for they are crafty ruffians, and none of us want an assegai through us. Half a dozen must remain here in charge of the horses."

It was some little time before it could be amicably settled who was to go and who was to remain. At

last the raiders were chosen, and stole off quietly, not speaking even in a whisper lest they should arouse some watchful sentinel in the village.

Donald Orde long remembered that stealthy march across the little kopjes which sheltered the Kaffir village.

The sky was crystal clear, lit by a myraid of sparkling stars, and the moon rode high in the heavens, shedding on the vast solitudes a flood of light such as is seen nowhere but under an African sky.

The bushman, who was familiar with the whole arrangement of the kraals, led the party, and with unerring aim brought them directly to the chief's own cattle kraal.

"I suppose you know your own cattle," whispered Batchelor to Van Ruysler. "Not that it matters much whether we take one or two of Molotsi's by mistake. It will be merely a case of tit-for-tat."

Van Ruysler nodded, and they pressed on to the low huts where the cattle were secured. Donald observed that Van Ruysler's Boer boy kept very close to his master's heels, as if afraid to let him out of his sight. By this time the village dogs were on the alert, and set up a mournful barking and howling to the night sky.

They had just forced, with no gentle hand, the gateway of the cattle-house, and were pressing in to discover whether any of the missing animals were there when a most terrific yell startled the stillness of the night, followed by a rush as of many feet, and presently the little company was surrounded by what appeared to be a whole host of black savages, brandishing their assegais above their heads. Foremost among them was Molotsi himself—a tall, splendid specimen of a man,

over six feet in height, and as erect as a desert palm, although well on to his sixtieth year.

Alive to the imminent peril of the moment, Batchelor stepped forward, and in a clear, ringing voice commanded Molotsi in the Queen's name to surrender and give up the stolen cattle of which they had come in search. His words arrested the yelling crowd for a moment, and the bushman, who was the only one of the party who understood the language, translated Molotsi's reply, which was to the effect that he knew nothing about the missing cattle, and was quite innocent of their theft.

"That may be so, friend," said Batchelor, with great good-humour. "Nevertheless, though your word may be as good as your bond, we want some substantial evidence in favour of it, so I must trouble you to trot out all the herd here until Mr. Van Ruysler is satisfied that none of his cattle have strayed this way."

The chief turned vindictively towards Van Ruysler, and they exchanged glances which seemed to Donald Orde full of significance when he remembered what Van Ruysler had said. He now began to realise that there was more danger in this expedition than any of them had supposed. Batchelor had all along treated it as a joke, or at least a very light affair; but it seemed to Donald that they were now very much at the mercy of the savages in their own quarters, and, further, that if any fighting fell to their share it would be against fearful odds. After that bitter glance at Van Ruysler Molotsi solemnly shook his head and, speaking through his interpreter, declined to allow his kraals to be searched.

Batchelor was a hot-tempered man, and given to acting on impulse. He had had a good deal of

experience of similar affairs, and was apt to treat the opposition of the natives with contempt. He simply gave his shoulders a shrug, and bade the boys force open the doors of the cattle shed. As they proceeded to do so a peculiar cry was passed from the Kaffirs, mouth to mouth, and the next moment the whole party was plunged into a fierce hand-to-hand conflict. The whites were somewhat taken by surprise, but only for a moment. Batchelor rose at once to the emergency, and with great coolness gave the order to "Fire."

A smart round from the rifles created a good deal of astonishment and discomfiture among the Kaffirs, and some of the more cowardly incontinently fled. A few, however, remained firm, and several of them fell pierced with English bullets. Batchelor made it his business to secure Molotsi, as chief and ringleader, and the whole affair was over in a few seconds.

It was not thought that any injury had been sustained by the whites, but, to the dismay of all, it was soon discovered that Van Ruysler himself had received a severe wound from the point of a treacherous assegai. He had not felt it at the moment when the blood of an old fighter was up in him, but directly the fray was over he felt a great faintness overcoming him, and then his faithful Boer discovered that the blood was flowing from a wound in the armpit.

The anguish on the boy's face as he supported his master's tottering footsteps was pitiful to behold. In a moment they had laid him on the soft dry grass, and Batchelor, who had considerable skill in binding up wounds, did his utmost to stanch the blood, and forcing a few drops of brandy between Van Ruysler's lips, managed to restore his sinking consciousness, and then they bore him sorrowfully back to the camp.



"A SMART ROUND FROM THE RIFLES CREATED A GOOD DEAL OF ASTONISHMENT."

Page 108.

"I doubt I've got my death-blow, Donald," he said in a weak whisper, as Donald bent over him, all his honest heart in his eyes, "at the hands of that black fiend Molotsi. I told you we bore each other a grudge—well, he's had the best of it this time."

"It will be the last time, then," said Donald quickly; "but you mustn't talk about a death-blow—it's only a flesh wound. We'll get you back to Doort's as gently and quickly as possible, and then Julie will nurse you well."

"Ay, ay, we'll go to Hofsplaats. But if I lie down there, Donald, I'm afraid I won't get up again. Promise me to take me right back to Ruysfontein. I don't want to peg out in an outlandish hole like Hofsplaats."

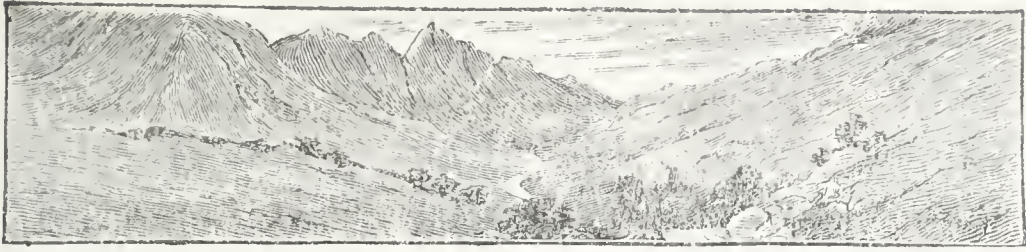
These words lay heavy on Donald Orde's soul. Although he was by no means apprehensive that Van Ruysler's condition was serious, still he did not like the tone or the drift of his words. He went at once to Batchelor, and after a brief consultation with him they agreed that half of the party should at once start for home, bearing the wounded man with them, and being followed at daybreak by those left to secure the cattle, which were now proved beyond doubt to be in Molotsi's quarters.

They had to journey back much more slowly than they had come, and the motion of the horse was so painful to Van Ruysler that they had to improvise a rude kind of litter in which to carry him; and so towards the close of the burning afternoon on the following day they came within sight of the outpost station.

Julie had not expected them back so quickly, but when madame came running to tell her they were in sight she ran out to meet them, scarcely pausing to

cover her head from the rays of the burning sun. When she got near enough to discover the individual members of the little cavalcade and to observe that they were carrying a strange arrangement which had no tgone away with them a great dread laid hold upon her heart, and she made an immediate guess at the truth. She was a woman who rose quickly to any emergency, and though she became deadly pale and even trembled at the thought of what she might immediately see and hear, she was perfectly self-possessed and calm when she met Donald, who observing her in the distance came quickly to meet her and prepare her for what had occurred.

"It's papa," she said quickly. "Something has been telling me all day that it has happened," she said before he spoke. "Perhaps if you had allowed me to go as I wished I might have saved his life."



CHAPTER XIV.

PUT TO THE TEST.



IN his own spacious and luxurious room at Ruysfontein Van Ruysler lay with his face turned to the window, which was ablaze with the glory of the setting sun. He had taken, in the latter stages of his illness, a strange dislike to his bed, and refused to allow himself to be moved from the couch, which was of the old-fashioned and luxurious sort—one of the many comforts he had had sent out for his wife from England. They had moved him, according to his wish, as quickly as they could from the outpost station back to his own home, and there he had been seen by the best surgeons in Durban. The wound itself was too slight to cause such serious and prolonged disturbance, and they quickly discovered, what they had from the first moment supposed to be the case, that the blade of the assegai before it aimed the fatal thrust must have been dipped in one of the mysterious and deadly poisons which are such powerful weapons in all savage warfare.

Van Ruysler from the first moment of his fall had apparently resigned himself to an inevitable fate, and

had never expressed the slightest hope of recovery, or indeed much desire for it.

It had been instructive and most impressive to Donald Orde during these weeks of close and loving attendance upon Van Ruysler to have so many proofs given him of the great and passionate love which the man bore to his dead wife. Life was indeed impossible to him without her, and, save for the leaving of his only child, he had no wish to get well; yet life had still much that was sweet and satisfactory to him. He had boundless wealth, a high and influential position in the Colony, and a prospect of a green old age surrounded by all that makes age honoured and happy; but the fact remained that he held all these things as nothing because the light of his life had gone out. This was the more astonishing to Donald when he pondered upon it, as he often did, because in the other relations of his life Van Ruysler was accounted a hard man—one who drove a sharp bargain and exacted his dues to the uttermost farthing. His character was indeed a somewhat complex study which Donald had not as yet fully mastered.

Julie was constant and unremitting in her care for her father. Donald and she shared it between them, allowing no alien persons in the room, no alien hand to touch the precious sufferer. Julie watched by day Donald by night. She had just gone down to prepare with her own hands the slight nourishment he was able to take, and Donald—the work of the day done on the farm—came to take her place.

“How are things going on, Donald?” Van Ruysler asked, as he seated himself by his side. “Everything running pretty smoothly, I hope?”

It was almost the first time that he had made any

allusion to outside concerns, having laid them all down quietly and with perfect confidence in Donald's ability to carry them on.

"Everything goes on well, sir," Donald answered. "There has been no further trouble at any of the out stations. Doort was here yesterday, and he is in high glee over the stock prospects, and says it will be the best year he has had on Hofsplaats."

"That's well," said Van Ruysler, with a kind of satisfied look on his face. "Not that it matters much to me now, but still it is better to hear that things are going well than ill."

"I wish you wouldn't speak like that, sir," said Donald quickly. "You have been better these last few days, and we're going to pull you round, see if we don't."

"No, lad. I told you that night that I had got my death-blow, and I know it is. It won't be many days now. I feel a growing weakness. I don't know what the doctor said to you last time he was up from Durban, but he told me they could do no more."

Donald was silent, and the extreme bitterness of rebellious grief shadowed his face.

"You have been a great and untold comfort to me, lad, since that day we chanced to meet in the bunk of the *Pembroke Castle*," said Van Ruysler presently. "I could not love you more if you were my own son."

Donald could not speak; but his proud, strong mouth trembled, and a dusky moisture filled his eyes and blurred out the whole surroundings.

"There are several little things on my mind that I want to speak to you about, Donald," said Van Ruysler presently. "A few little things and one big one. Perhaps I'd better tackle it first."

"Yes, sir," said Donald, striving to steady his voice.

"I told Julie to go for a ride with Michael," said Van Ruysler then. "Do you happen to know if she has gone?"

"I think she has. At least, Michael was getting the horses saddled as I came in."

"Ah! well, she is safe for an hour, and that is well, because it is of her I wish to speak."

Donald said nothing, his heart told him what was coming.

"The only care or anxiety I have had since I have been shut up here, my boy, has been on Julie's account. I have pondered it well, and now I must speak, for the time is short. I don't know when the idea first occurred to me—but I think it must have been very soon after you came—that nothing could be more satisfactory than if Julie and you should learn to care for each other. My wife was of the same mind with me. She often spoke of it, and the last thing she said to me aboard ship the day she died was that I was to do everything in my power to further a marriage between you and Julie. She left a letter for you, written by her own hand. I have never given it to you, because it relates entirely to this matter; and I was not to give it, she said, until the time was ripe. I have watched you closely, and I have never seen that the time had come to speak of it again, or to give you her last message."

Donald was silent when Van Ruysler paused. He could think of nothing to say, and his heart seemed heavy as stone within his breast.

"Will you tell me why it is that the child who seems to have the power of captivating every man who comes within sight of her has never been able to touch you?"

"I don't know," answered Donald simply, as the question was put. "I suppose it's because we have been so intimate and lived exactly like brother and sister."

"There may be something in that," said Van Ruysler; "but the very fact that you knew each other so well and have been such good friends all these years seems to me to make the question so much simpler. Is it that you still remain true to the Scotch maiden in that far-away Glen of yours—the maiden who has forgotten you so quickly?"

Donald held his peace. It was not a moment for prevarication or pretence; he could not deny, therefore but held his peace.

"It seems to me fruitless and sad for you to brood over that old dream. Do you know what is in my heart at this moment, Donald, and what would give me peace to die?"

Donald shook his head.

"I may guess," he said in a low voice, "but I cannot utter it."

"Well, if you and Julie would take one another for better or worse in this room before my eyes I should close them in peace, and know that I had left my child in safe protection, and that her happiness would be sure. I say nothing of what you would gain by such a marriage, because I know that you are above the conditions which affect most men. It is because I know you are above this, and because you would make a woman's happiness your first earthly care if you took those vows upon you, that I am so anxious. I have not been a religious man, Donald, nor a praying one, but many a day and hour on this couch have I prayed that this thing might come to pass."

"Julie herself has to be considered," said Donald, from between his dry lips. "She might not be willing."

"She might not," assented Van Ruysler, loyal even in his strong anxiety to the child whose future he was thus trying to arrange. "But with her at least there is none other; and as I told you one day before, I am afraid to leave her as she is—the heiress to wealth which she can never spend or use; a prey to every adventurer who may turn up."

"I am not much better," said Donald gloomily. "I came to your door a needy waif; you have made me what I am."

"Hush, lad," said the settler sharply. "Whatever I have done for you has been repaid a thousand-fold. What have I given you in return? Less than I have to pay to that great fat Doort, who does nothing but smoke his pipe at my expense. You have relieved me of untold anxiety in a thousand different directions. It is because I know and have proved you that I would bestow upon you my greatest earthly treasure."

He scanned the young man's face eagerly, and with a pathetic wistfulness which was more than Donald could bear. He had all his nation's caution in meeting the great crisis of life, and even to remove that yearning look from the eyes of the man he loved as a son he could not make a rash promise without taking into consideration all that promise would involve.

"Will you give me one hour to think it over, sir?" he said, with a humility and tenderness it is impossible to describe. "It's not that I am indifferent to the great honour and confidence you bestow upon me, it is of her I am thinking, and her alone."

"For such a wife," said Van Ruysler eagerly, "most men would dare much."

"Yes," said Donald readily, "it is because she deserves so much that I hesitate. But you will leave the decision with her?"

"Oh yes, without her decision we can do nothing. Go and think it over, lad, and take this letter with you. If it doesn't help you to a decision it will at least show you in what estimation she held you."

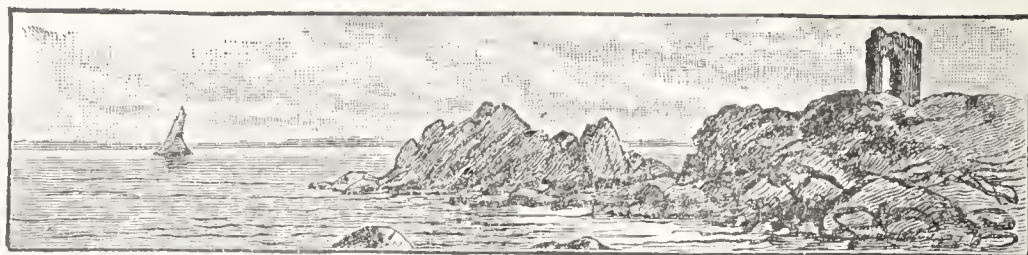
He took the letter from the breast-pocket of his dressing-gown and gave it into Donald's hand. He took it with an almost reverential touch. It seemed to him like a message from the dead.

"Sir," he said, almost tremblingly, "you don't misunderstand this hesitation of mine? You who have proved to the full the blessedness of a perfect marriage must know that the marriage which is not perfect is a thing accursed."

"These are strong words, boy, but they are true. No, I honour you for your hesitation. Take time to consider, and if this thing cannot be, why then I must just leave my girl to the care of that Providence which is over all. Send Jan Groot to me as you go down, and if you can see Julie before you come back, so much the better. There is but little time to spare."

Donald silently left the room. On the stairs he came upon the Boer boy, sitting disconsolately, with his head buried in his hands.

"Your master wants you, Jan," he said, and the lad sprang up with a kind of glorified look on his face. "It is not given to many to win so much devotion," was Donald's thought as he passed from the house into the exquisite still coolness of the outer air.



CHAPTER XV.

“TILL DEATH US DO PART.”



His steps turned naturally to the familiar shelter of the grey boulder on the little kopje behind the house. He threw himself on the warm grass, and leaning his elbow on the sand, rested his chin on his hands and looked away across the rolling stretches of the veldt ; but he saw nothing of it. Again his thoughts had flown across the seas to the green Glen set like a gem among its misty hills, and with that dear vision before him he brought himself sternly face to face with this great crisis of his life. It was not only a great crisis, but he knew that should he fall in with the wishes of Van Ruysler it would be the final one—in that it would for ever cut him off from the old life, and make it impossible for him to cherish even its memory as he did now with the tenderness of an enduring love. He did not know until this moment how real and precious had been the thought of his return one day to the Glen. He realised now, also, that he had never really believed that Fiona had entirely forgotten him, or given her heart and hand to his old rival, Hamish Chisholme of Ruglas. He had written to her again and again, and though no

reply had ever reached him he had striven to retain his belief in her constancy.

The question he had to face now was whether he could for ever renounce all that was sacred and dear to him in that far-off time, and also whether in so doing he could do his faithful duty as husband to Julie Van Ruysler. He was not one who could accept responsibility lightly. His manhood had come to him : there had awakened in his sometime careless heart a graver sense of life's more serious meaning, and it was his desire and aim (never expressed, but secretly held) to do his duty, to the utmost of his power, in whatever sphere he found himself.

He was very fond of Julie Van Ruysler with a calm, brotherly affection. Her many moods amused and interested him, and he loved to tease her, although he would never willingly vex her heart ; but to enter into the close and trying relationship of marriage with her was another question. She was indeed a creature of impulse and mood, and passionate likes and dislikes. He could easily fancy her in some circumstances a trying companion. His one long and vain regret, as he lay there in the midst of his sore perplexity, was that he had not taken a swift journey to Scotland immediately that Julie and her father had returned, to learn for himself what truth there might be in the rumour that Fiona and Hamish Chisholme were to be married. That she had never replied to any of his letters was ominous ; but he had striven not to attach too much importance to her silence, and knew now that he had always been hoping—though perhaps against hope—that one day soon everything might be cleared up. To add one hour of peace or happiness to Van Ruysler's sad life Donald Orde would willingly

have sacrificed much, but the sacrifice of perhaps two lives was a serious thing to be considered. No uttered prayer passed his lips, but in his heart there was a mute uplifting, a silent cry for guidance and light upon the path which was obscure and dim.

He bethought himself suddenly of the letter which Van Ruysler had put into his hand, and, drawing it out of his pocket, he broke the seal and spread it out upon the short grass, the dusky twilight enabling to decipher it and that was all. "My beloved son," it began. "I call you so because I feel to you as a mother feels towards her boy, and because you have ever given to me the sweetest devotion that can be lavished upon any mother by any son. I write these few lines to you in great weakness and weariness, knowing that they will be my last. I cannot die without sending you this last message to thank you for all you have been to me since that happy day my husband brought you to Ruysfontein. You made life happier and easier for a weak and suffering woman, who was so sadly dependent on those around her for all that made life tolerable. I commend to you before I die my little girl. I have prayed to God lying here in the silent watches of the night, with nothing to disturb me but the rocking of the waves against the vessel's side, that He might put it into your heart and hers to become husband and wife. When that does come, as I pray and hope it will, you will know that my blessing rests upon you both. She is a strange and wayward child, and I feel that with you she would be safe: that in your solid qualities of head and heart she would find that balancing power which is lacking in her own nature. I know that these things cannot be forced, but I feel that I should like you to know what

is in my heart concerning this. Good-bye, my beloved son, until we meet at the last great day. Your attached and loving mother, AMELIE VAN RUYSLER."

Donald Orde's eyes were wet as they scanned those trembling and tender words; before he folded the letter up he pressed it against his lips and rose slowly to his feet. His decision was made.

In the far distance he caught sight of two rapidly approaching figures on horseback—those of Julie and her attendant. He walked down the little hill with a steady and somewhat determined step, and strode out to meet them. He saw a look of alarm on her face, and she pressed her pony forward as if she thought he was the bearer of some sad news.

"It is all right, Julie—Jan Groot is with your father. I hope you have had a pleasant ride."

He took her bridle rein over his arm and looked up into her face with a grave and searching tenderness which she felt but could not understand.

She was indeed a most lovely and radiant creature. The swift gallop across the veldt in the clear, cool evening air had flushed her cheek with its most exquisite colour. Her eyes were sparkling, and she seemed the very embodiment of youth and health and grace.

"Let Michael take the horses, Julie," he said gently, "and let us walk across to the kopje. There is no hurry to go in and I've something to say to you."

She slipped obediently from her horse, and throwing the reins to Michael, he drew her hand within his arm; but they never spoke one single word until they had returned to the spot which Donald had so lately left.

"What's the meaning of this strange way of going on, Don?" asked Julie, a trifle impatiently, when she had seated herself on her throne, as she often called the seat hewn in the rock, and he stood before her in the same strange silence.

"Your father has been talking to me to-night very seriously, Julie," he said with the same tender gravity of demeanour. "What do you think was his theme?"

"He will not be with us long, Don," she answered with a faint, dry sob in her voice. "I have seen a change in him for several days—but especially to-day. Have you not?"

"I don't think he will live long," he admitted; for it was useless now to try to reassure her, or to encourage hopes which could only be destroyed. "It is in our power, Julie, yours and mine, to make him much happier the little time he is with us."

"What do you mean?" she asked wonderingly. "Can we do more for him than we are doing? It seems impossible."

"No, it is not that. He has great anxiety about you, dear—great and natural anxiety, and it is his heart's desire that you should give me the right to take care of you after he is gone."

"How—in what way? You will still take care of me and be kind to me as you have always been," she cried impulsively. "I have been comforted often, thinking of the day when papa must leave me, by the thought that you would be left."

"I should be left certainly," he said slowly—thinking what a child she was in some things still. "But it could not be the same, Julie, you must know that. I could not even live here at Ruysfontein except on one condition."

Her cheeks were aflame and her eyes shone, but not a word passed her trembling lips.

"Your father is willing to give you to me, Julie, though you are his greatest earthly treasure. He is willing that you should be my wife if you will. There is no other condition on which we can continue at Ruysfontein. I am quite unworthy, dear—I am nobody, and I have nothing but an honest heart and a pair of clean hands. With these, Julie, I will do my best if you will but trust me."

Her heart seemed to stand still, and she could hear her own strangely laboured breath. She had loved this man for years passionately and hopelessly; yet now his words seemed to chill her, she could not tell why.

"I—I do not take it in, Don," she said faintly, at last. "I love my father very much; there is nothing I would not do to save him pain or to make him happy. But this seems rather a terrible thing for you and me unless we care for each other. You don't ask me like a man who cares much——"

"Listen, Julie," he said gravely. "I want to be very frank and honest with you. It is imperative at this crisis of our lives. Years ago I loved Fiona Forbes—at least, I suppose it was love, it was a kind of heart hunger—it is impossible to describe, but it never left me night or day—I constantly thought of the time when I should see her and never have to leave her again. But she has never answered my letters, and so I think she has forgotten me, even before you told me last year that she was to marry Hamish Chisholme of Ruglas. It hurt me very much more than I could ever tell you or anybody, because I could have staked my life on Fiona's fealty. Now

she is married to another man why should I live lonely and miserable when this happiness is within my reach? I have pretended nothing; but if you will marry me I will never play you false, but love and cherish you to the last day of my life."

He ceased, and there was a great silence between them, broken only by the droning hum of the cicada in the stunted thornbush and the far-off cry of some desert creature to its mate. The flame had faded from her cheek and left it white as the little hand that strove vainly to still its own trembling against her heart.

"Perhaps you will not be able to do that, Don," she said at last, in a dry whisper. "I am a selfish, wicked creature, and I might—I might try you very much."

"So shall I you, probably," he answered cheerfully. "But after a little we shall get shaken down to each other's ways and be very comfortable. The only thing that troubles me—and it does trouble me a good deal—is that you will be so rich, and men will call me a fortune-hunter and names much worse than that, Julie."

"If they dare!" she cried, and all the fierce passion of the South leaped in her. "If they dare I would kill them. I could kill anybody who said such things about one I loved."

The words thrilled him, and for the first time some faint, responsive passion stirred in his veins.

"If you trust me, Julie," he said simply, "they can say what they will."

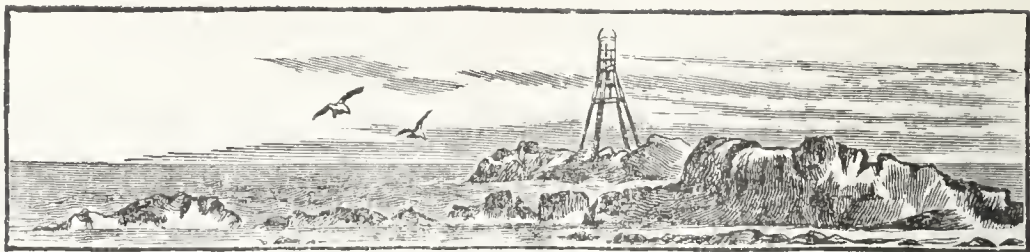
She threw herself sobbing on his breast, and he had been less than a man not to clasp her close and whisper some words of love in her ear.

"Promise me that you will never hate or grow tired of me, Don. If you ever do I shall kill myself, remember that."

What could he do but promise her? and having soothed her he took her gently back to the room where the dying man waited their coming with the impatient eagerness of a great and overwhelming desire. Before daybreak Donald Orde was in the saddle, and at sundown two days later returned from Durban with the good bishop riding by his side. And within an hour Donald Orde and Julie Van Ruysler were made husband and wife. If the bridegroom looked white and strange, and the bride less consciously happy than other brides the good bishop had seen, he attributed it to the sad circumstances under which the ceremony took place.

Next day Van Ruysler died.

Donald Orde thought his life was now mapped out and ordered for him, and looking ahead he saw it stretch before him like the waters of a summer sea—untroubled even by a passing wind of adversity. But the vision of mortals has its set bounds. Life held many a fierce tumult yet for Donald Orde.



CHAPTER XVI.

CHISHOLME OF RUGLAS.



CASTLE RUGLAS, the home of the Chisholmes, stood at the head of its own Glen of Ruglas, midway between Garrows and Dalnaspidal. Although it was eight or nine miles nearer the haunts of men, it was a wild, barren, and desolate region, which might have been outside the limits of the world. The glen itself was narrow, and the treeless hills rose from it precipitously on either side. It had the name of being the barest glen in the Highlands, but it had a wealth of heather of special richness and bloom, which in August gave it a glow and glory all its own. The Ruglas Burn, which ran at the foot of the hills, was often dried up in summer, though in winter it had many a grand flood, when the snows melted on the hills and every little streamlet ran in to swell its tide. The house stood on a high plateau at the head of the glen, a grey old battlemented mass, with a few stunted fir-trees for shelter and the whole glen for a view before its windows.

It was a bare house inside as well as out, though it need not have been, the Chisholmes being wealthy

among Highland lairds. But they were not a soft race, even the womankind among them, and so the house remained much as it had been in old feudal times, bare and comfortless, yet with a certain impressiveness which might have been destroyed had they sought to alter its character. The drawing-room had been furnished in yellow pine, which time had mellowed into a rich brown colour. The old chintz covers in which the upright chairs were draped preserved seats of cunning workmanship, trophies of the needle wrought by the Chisholme ladies in the days when their lords rode out to pillage and to fight.

The present Laird of Ruglas—the lad, Hamish, who had been at school in Perth with Donald Orde—was now grown to man's estate. He bore no resemblance to the pictures of his ancestors which lined the gloomy old dining-room. They had been great strong, stalwart giants. He took after his mother's family, who were small and dark and not particularly comely to look upon. He had a great conceit of himself, and was particularly proud of his heavy black moustache, which he was perpetually caressing into the most approved shape. He was the idol of his mother's heart—she being a widow having only one son. She was surprised one afternoon when he found his way into her drawing-room, where it was her habit to rest after luncheon, and she at once guessed that he had something particular to say to her.

He wore his riding breeches and a coat of Harris tweed—garb in which a big man looks well, but a little one smaller and more insignificant. His mother looked up in mild surprise from her knitting and her book. She was a small, genteel person with rather a shrewish face. Her son resembled her very much.

"I'm for Garrows this afternoon, mother," he said abruptly. "I'm going to ride, and perhaps I won't be back until late—it'll depend."

"On what?" she asked, with a good deal of interest in her voice.

"You ought to guess. It'll depend on what sort of a reception I get. I'm going to see Fiona, and to get 'Ay' or 'No' from her."

"Are you so set on her, Hamish?" asked Lady Chisholme with rather a sour look on her face. "I thought she as good as gave you 'No' before."

"So she did, but that was a while ago, when there was some talk of Orde coming back. He'll never come back after he's got a taste of the lawless life out there. He's a worse ne'er-do-weel now, I'll warrant you, than he was when he went away."

"It's the ne'er-do-weels that win women's hearts, Hamish," his mother said with a half sigh. "I can't think myself what you all see in Fiona Forbes. A proud, upsetting, disagreeable creature, I call her. Ruglas will never hold her and me, Hamish; I tell you that flatly."

"I never expected it would, mother," answered Chisholme placidly. "I don't think it's fair to any woman to ask her to marry and live in the same house as one's mother. There's sure to be ructions. But you and I understand each other, and Muckairn is a very comfortable house, neither too near nor too far away."

Lady Chisholme slightly frowned and took a sniff at the old-fashioned vinaigrette that hung on her chatelaine. She did not relish the prospect of being relegated to Muckairn, which was an outlandish house, really a shooting-box on the shores of Muckairn Loch,

situated in a wild and remote part of the Chisholme dominions.

“Have you seen her lately?” she asked, “and has she given you any encouragement to think that she’ll treat you differently to-day?”

“I don’t know; I’m going to try my luck again, anyhow. She’s the only woman for me, and if she won’t have me it’s a certain truth that I’ll never have anybody else.”

“She might do a good deal worse, Hamish. Who is she after all?—a nobody. Her father, Malcolm Forbes, was little above a farmer, and it’s not to be expected that Maclean is going to leave the place past his own brother’s son, although he is a ne’er-do-weel.”

“He’ll provide for Fiona, you can rest assured of that,” said Chisholme confidently. “She’s the very apple of his eye.”

“But you are not a poor man, Hamish. Ruglas’ coffers are full enough, and you don’t need to be dangling after anybody for siller’s sake.”

“It’s not that I want; it’s Fiona, and Fiona I mean to have. Well, I needn’t stand here talking any longer. It’s time I was off. If I’m back quick you’ll know that I have fared badly; but if you should have to eat your dinner alone you can make sure that Fiona has been kinder to me than the last time I tried my luck.”

So saying, Chisholme took himself off. His mother moved her chair to the window for a little space, and watched him ride down the glen on a great black charger which caused his small, slight figure to look out of all proportion with his steed. She was very fond of her son, but not blind to his physical defects, and as she went back to her snug corner by the fireside

and composed herself for her afternoon nap there was a satisfied look on her face.

“Fiona Forbes will never look at him. There’s too many braw wooers riding to Garrows for Hamish to have a chance.”

Chisholme’s good black horse carried him up to Garrows in a little over an hour, and he was fortunate in arriving to find Fiona alone. Maclean was very frail now—only able to be out of doors on fine days, and then in a carriage propped round with pillows. He was never to be seen of an afternoon, when he was glad to snatch the sleep so often denied him through the long, restless nights.

Fiona was sitting all alone in the drawing-room. It was a November afternoon, a dull, snell day, when there is no cosier place than the chimney corner. She was sewing busily, for Christmas was at hand, and she had many poor bodies to remember in the Glen. The years had not dealt perhaps so lightly with Fiona Forbes as with some. They had been trying years, weighed down by the heart sickness of hope deferred.

She had nursed her aunt through her last trying illness, and now was her uncle’s faithful and devoted companion. The whole care of the household and of the estate rested on her shoulders. She was one to whom all instinctively turned in difficulty or trouble, and the bearing of so many burdens had left their mark. She was a woman weighed down by a woman’s cares before her time. She had grown very tall, and though slender with it, carried herself with a straight and noble grace. Her face had less colour than one might have expected of one living in such hardy and invigorating latitudes, and it had a seriousness of expression and a deep thoughtfulness in the large

eyes which sometimes vexed the hearts of those who loved her, and these were many. From Garrows to Dalnaspidal the name of Fiona Forbes was well beloved.

When the servant announced the Laird of Ruglas, the colour did flicker momentarily in her face ; but she betrayed no embarrassment when she rose quietly to meet him, though she feared greatly that his errand might be a personal one—such errands Fiona had learned to dread of late since more than one suitor had presented himself at Garrows.

“How are you, Sir Hamish?” she asked cordially. “I hope your mother is well. You’ll be sorry to hear that my uncle is very poorly to-day. I am expecting Dr. MacAlister or his son every moment—indeed, I thought it was one of them when the bell rang.”

“I’m sorry to hear that indeed,” answered Chisholme, with a gentleness which was not common in him. He had a most trying and irritable temper which kept those about him in perpetual hot water, but Fiona had a soothing effect upon him, and seemed to draw out all that was best in him to the surface.

“Yes, he is very poorly,” she said mournfully. “Often I can’t bear to think about it, but I’m afraid it is no use disguising the truth any longer ; I am sure he will not live long.”

Chisholme was silent, and took a turn or two across the floor. In the face of her anxiety and grief concerning her uncle’s condition he hardly knew how to approach the cause for which he had come ; but there was a good deal of dour Highland determination in him, and he did not feel disposed to leave without giving at least some hint of his desire.

Fiona reseated herself and took up her sewing.

"Won't you sit down? I'm afraid I am very remiss," she said cordially. "I needn't ring for tea, for I remember you have a great contempt for folk who drink tea in the afternoon," she added with a mischievous smile on her sweet, sad lips. "I hope you will explain to Lady Chisholme that it's only my close attendance on my uncle that has prevented my coming to Ruglas. It is rather a long drive for him even on a fine day, and I should be uneasy to leave him so long."

"My mother quite understands," he said quickly. "She will come and see you herself one day soon, she bade me tell you so."

"I shall be glad to see her," said Fiona. "I think we are going to have an open winter, don't you? Yet Dr. MacAlister says there is a good deal of sickness in all the glens, and that a green Yule is never a healthy one. I rather think myself that I miss the snow—Craigbhan never looks so well as with his white night-cap on."

Chisholme made no reply to this, and Fiona began to feel desperately uncomfortable. Her intuition told her what was coming, and she did not know how to avert it. To leave the room would be rude, so she resigned herself, hoping he would say his say quickly, so that the matter might be ended once for all.

"It doesn't seem very kind to speak of one's self when you are so troubled about Maclean, Fiona," he said presently; and though in their young days they had been Hamish and Fiona to each other, somehow she felt inclined to resent his utterance of her name. "I've held my tongue as long as I could, and now I must speak again. Do you remember that you didn't say 'no' so positively last time?"

"Didn't I?" said Fiona, with strongly expressed

surprise. "I thought I did. I'm very sorry, Sir Hamish, but I can't think of you in that way, and I'm afraid I never will."

"But listen, Fiona," he pleaded eagerly, and she felt sorry for him, he was so much in earnest. "Think what it will be for you if anything happens to Maclean. Why, you will be left quite alone. I would take such good care of you—as good as I know how. Perhaps I haven't been so good as I ought, but you'd help me, Fiona, that's the sort of effect you have on a fellow. You make him so miserable because he feels unworthy to speak to you."

"Oh, hush, Hamish," cried Fiona, distressed beyond measure at his words. "When you speak like that it makes it so hard for me to tell you it's no use. I am sure I shall never care for anybody in that way. It would be wrong for you to go on hoping. It's far better to tell you so quite plainly. But I hope we can still be friends, for there is nothing more hard to bear, I think, than to lose one's friends in that or any other way."

Her words were decisive, and Chisholme felt that they were final. Now, he had never been thwarted in his life, and this was perhaps the dearest wish he had ever cherished. The momentary gentleness died out of his face, and a hard, bitter look took its place.

"I believe you're still thinking of that ne'er-do-weel, Donald Orde, Fiona, who has treated you and us all so badly. If he ever shows his face in the Glen I'll hound him out of it."

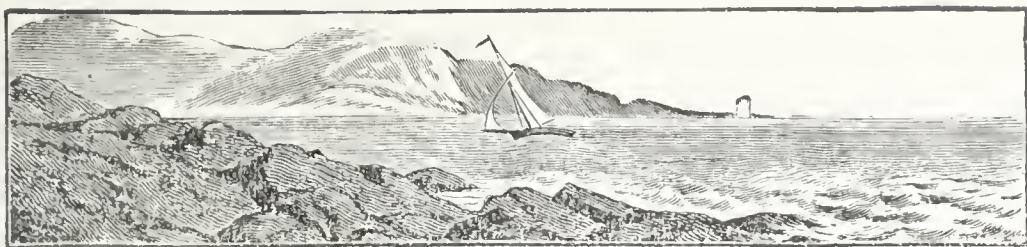
Then Fiona grew very white, and it was with anger.

"You forget yourself, Sir Hamish," she said. "Donald Orde is my friend. Nobody will ever take his place, and I will believe in him to the end, although I die before I hear what his long silence means."

"He's a lucky beggar to have won so much devotion unasked," he said with a sneer, his jealous anger getting the better of his courtesy and common sense.

Then her anger flashed forth, and the words which fell from her lips smote him where he stood.

"You are a cur and a coward, Hamish Chisholme," she cried passionately, "and I will never speak to you again as long as I live!"



CHAPTER XVII.

UNFORGOTTEN, WELL-BELOVED.



RODDIE MACALISTER, riding up the Glen to pay the daily visit to Maclean, saw Hamish Chisholme leave the gate of Garrows and urge his black steed at a gallop up the bridle path which led over the hills to Ruglas. A curious grim smile came on the young doctor's broad face, and he drew his own conclusions. In spite of his school-boy freaks and follies, Roddie MacAlister had done well at the University of Aberdeen, and many said that it was a shame for him to bury himself in the wild Highlands, where the work was so hard and the living so poor. But after the graduation day, although professors and student friends alike advised him, Roddie turned his face homeward without a moment's hesitation or a single qualm of regret. For his father was getting old, he was no longer able for the long night drives through the blinding drift, but needed help, and Roddie knew that his place was at home; for there were six boys and girls under him to be provided for and launched in life, and he knew right well that his father could not afford to let the practice go down, nor to allow any other man to step in and take away any of his patients. It was no hardship to

Roddie MacAlister to give ambition the go-by and take up cheerfully and willingly the arduous and often unremunerative duties of a country practitioner. After he joined his father, however, the practice largely increased, and they had every country house within the radius of five-and-twenty miles.

There was nothing professional about Roddie MacAlister. He was well grown, but his figure was squat and a trifle ungainly, and his face, though broad and good-natured and pleasant to look upon, was very freckled and hopelessly plain. Then his shock of red hair defied all his violent efforts to induce it to lie smooth and flat. The only headgear, indeed, which accorded at all with that unruly head was a tweed cap which he wore as often as anything else. He was a dear and welcome visitor always to Garrows. It would be hard to say whether the Laird or Fiona was more rejoiced to see him when he arrived that day. Maclean was still asleep, and he marched up with all the familiarity of an old friend to the drawing-room to get his afternoon cup of tea from Fiona's hand.

He saw from her face the moment he stepped within the door that she had been vexed or annoyed, but he did not appear to notice it, and only asked in the usual way for her health and that of her uncle.

"He's asleep. Perhaps he'll be awake by the time we've had tea, Roddie," she said, and the pained, indignant look gradually softened away from her face. "It is so nice to see you. I hoped you would come to-day instead of your father." She felt grateful to him indeed with no common gratitude, though she could not have said why at the moment. He was so kind and straightforward always, and never made trouble or discomfort anywhere.

"I thought I saw Chisholme on Garrows brae as I came up, Fiona," he said carelessly.

"Yes, you did," she answered. "But he will not come in a hurry to Garrows again, I'm thinking."

"You've given him his leave, Fiona?" said Roddie, with a kindly interest a brother might have shown.

"Yes, this is the second time. I was so angry with him to-day, Roddie, I could have killed him nearly. I didn't know it was in me to be so angry. I do think that Hamish Chisholme is the meanest creature in the whole world."

"That's rather rough on him, poor beggar," said Roddie, "especially after you've sent him away."

"But just listen to what he said," she cried indignantly. "I'm so ashamed I hardly know how to tell you, but yet I must, for if I don't tell somebody it will burn into my heart. Tell me, Roddie, is it usual for a man when a girl refuses him to say the worst things he can think of about another man simply because he feels an insane jealousy of him?"

"I've heard they sometimes do," said Roddie vaguely. "But, you see, I've no experience of that kind of thing myself."

"Well, it was of Don he spoke, Roddie. He called him names, and then said he was lucky in having won my devotion unsought. Don't you think that was mean and insulting?"

"By Jove, that it was, and I only wish I had heard him!" cried Roddie, his honest face flushing. "I'd have had the greatest possible pleasure in kicking him downstairs. I hope you showed him properly what you thought, Fiona."

"I think I did, but you see I was so fearfully angry I hardly knew what I said. It hurts me when people

say such things about Don, Roddie. It is a shame, I think, to call any person a ne'er-do-weel or a blackguard without any proof. Nobody knows how honourably and nobly he may be living his life where he is to-day."

"No, nobody knows," said Roddie, "worse luck."

"But you're not going back on him, surely," said Fiona hotly, something in his voice wounding her to the quick. "Whatever happens, you and I must stand by Don, Roddie; against the whole world, if need be. You see he trusted us."

"He did, but he has tried us a good lot. Don't look so sad, I'm only saying what is true, and you know it. I'm just as convinced as you are that he's all right; in fact, I would as soon think that you weren't true and honest as believe it of him; but at the same time I wish his long neglect could be explained, if only to shut up people's mouths."

Fiona knelt down on the hearth and clasped her hands in front of her, watching the flame dancing in and out of the pine logs, her eyes wide and pathetic with the unspeakable yearning in her heart. It gave Roddie MacAlister's honest heart a keen pang to see that look and to read its meaning, for her face spoke—if ever woman's face could—of a great, undying, enduring love.

"If you hadn't been a doctor, Roddie, and so necessary to your father," she said presently, "I should have begged you to go out to South Africa and find out what it all means. I'm sure there's some explanation of it, and that it will be cleared up one day. It is the uncertainty which is so hard to bear."

"Perhaps my father might spare me for a few months in the summer time, when the work is lighter. I'll think about it,"

She turned round to him swiftly, her sweet eyes swimming in tears, and laid her white hand on his.

“Oh, Roddie, I do think you are the best fellow in the world. I wish I could tell you how grateful I am for all you have been and done for me since Don went away.”

The “best fellow in the world” shifted a little uneasily in his seat and finally sprang up. He had no small power of endurance; he had crushed down many a longing desire out of loyalty to his absent friend, but there were some things flesh and blood could hardly stand. To have Fiona’s face so near his and to feel the touch of her hand without betraying anything of his hopeless love was a task beyond him, so he got up and strode over to the window, remarking carelessly that the first flakes of a snow-storm were beginning to flutter thinly through the air. Under pretext of having other visits to pay he only waited to see Maclean for a few minutes and then left the house.

The old chief still made a point of dressing and coming down to eat his dinner with Fiona, although since the days grew cold and the old man felt every faint change in the atmosphere, the meal had been laid in the library, which was a small octagon room—a very comfortable and cosy place, which Fiona preferred to any other room in the house. Dinner, so far as the eating of it was concerned, was to Maclean a mere pretence. Farquharson still kept guard behind his master’s chair, ceremoniously offered him every dish, and sometimes persuaded him to pretend to eat a morsel; but it was always a relief to both when dessert came and Farquharson could fill up the big old-fashioned glass with generous port, which he knew his master would drink and enjoy. Then the big chair

was wheeled before the fire, the old man placed in it, with a plaid over his knees; Fiona sat beside him, with her work or a book; and so the quiet days were spent at Garrows, one sadder a little than the other because of some observed and growing weakness in the poor old Laird.

He was really ill enough to be continually in his own room if not in his bed, but the old Highland spirit moved him to fight the last enemy even on the very threshold. He was a striking and melancholy figure in his clothes, which hung upon his attenuated frame and showed pitifully the ravages which age and disease had wrought. His hair was very thin and white, his cheeks sunken, and his lips white and drawn. Only the eyes seemed to shine as clearly and fearlessly as of yore. A great gentleness marked Maclean's demeanour in his failing years. Often Farquharson would retire on the verge of weeping, and mutter to himself in the passage that all the spunk had gone out of the Laird; even Fiona herself sometimes wished him less tender and considerate. He was indeed like a different man.

"Put away your work, Fiona," said the old man, when Farquharson had cleared the table and trimmed the candles on the mantelshelf. "Get pen and ink and paper. There is a letter I want you to write."

"Yes, uncle."

Fiona rose obediently, got her writing-case from its drawer below the bookcase, and sat down to the table.

"I want you to write another letter to Donald, Fiona. It is in my heart that the time has come for me to write to him again, and something tells me that this time he will answer us, good or bad."

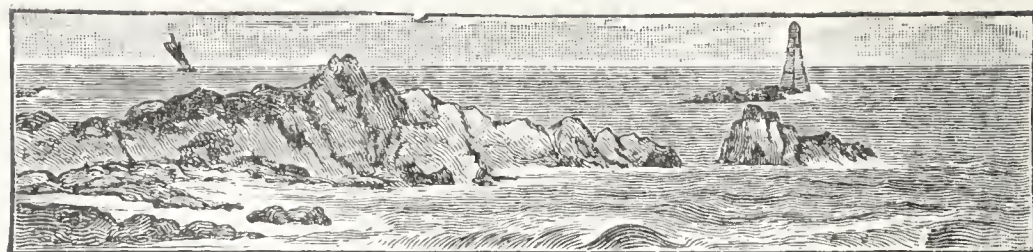
"Yes, uncle," said Fiona, very low, and her hand

trembled as she wrote down the date upon the fair page before her.

“ Write it from yourself, lassie. Tell him I am sair failed, and that the place needs a guiding hand. Tell him that he is not forgotten in Garrows, and that if he will but come everything will be forgotten ; that I feel to him as if he were my ain son, and that I long for him with a father’s longing. And when ye have said all that, Fiona, and anything else ye may think of on your ain part, I will e’en tak’ the pen an’ write a word at the end mysel’. It may be that the trembling message frae his auld uncle will touch his heart if it be na as stone to us an’ the Glen.”

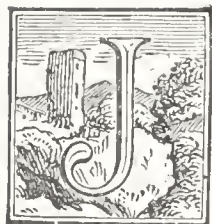
Then Fiona wrote, and the letter took long to write, and some tears fell on it which blistered the page, but which were destined to send a dart of keener anguish to the heart of an exile under the far-off sunny skies of Africa.

Next day the letter was directed and sealed, and left by the week’s mail for Ruysfontein.



CHAPTER XVIII.

FROM OUT THE PAST.



JULIE stood in the verandah, her white hands clasped before her, her dusky eyes full of unshed tears. Below the horses waited, and she heard her husband giving some final directions to the house steward regarding her safety while he should be gone. Business connected with the estate called him to Durban for a whole week, and the nature of the journey was such that he had decided not to allow Julie to accompany him. She had rebelled at first, but finding him firm had acquiesced with at least a semblance of cheerfulness. His quick tread sounded behind her, and stepping forward he clasped her in his arms.

“Good-bye, then, sweetheart. Keep your pecker up, and I’ll expect to see you at Muller’s on Friday night. I’ve given Michael all the instructions. He and Wilhelm will bring you so far to meet me.”

“I don’t need so many protectors, Don. How often have I ridden to Muller’s and back without escort of any kind?”

“I don’t choose that you should do that now you belong to me, my lady,” he responded lightly. “Now, no crying, baby; what’s four days?”

"Eternity to me, Don," she replied passionately. "Though it is nothing to you."

"Now that's too bad, throwing down the gauntlet at the last moment when I've no time to take it up. Promise me you'll be a good girl and not mope, and above all that you won't go more than a mile or two across the veldt unless Michael or Wilhelm is with you."

"You treat me just as if I was a child, Don."

"So you are in some things, dear. Well, wife, I must go. What shall I bring you from Durban? Trinkets or bonbons, or both?"

"Only yourself—I want none of these things when you are here, Don," she cried passionately, as before. "*Do* you care for me, Don? Tell me again."

"Of course I do. Why will you torment yourself on that score? I've told you a thousand times and more——"

"And you'll always care, whatever happens? Promise me that?"

"It is easy, Julie; I have nobody on earth but you I don't forget it."

There was something in these words—a veiled sadness—which stung her.

"You've given up everything for me, Don. Sometimes I fear you find it hard to forgive me."

"Hush, child, no more of that nonsense. If you and I are to be happy, Julie, as we ought to be and are, there must be no going back. If I gave up anything, look at what I have gained."

He lifted her sweet, flower-like face to his and kissed it with tenderness. Yet she was not satisfied, and the tears which blinded her eyes as she watched him ride away were bitter tears which brought no ease to her heart. She had got her heart's desire. She had now

been wife to Donald Orde for a year, and, though he was everything the most exacting could desire, she was not happy, nor could be, for conscience would not sleep.

About fifty miles from Ruysfontein Donald and his companion encountered the mail carrier resting from the noonday heat under the welcome shelter of a small clump of trees near a spring. Donald was pleased when he observed him, because he expected some news from Durban which might materially alter the plan of his journey. The man was sound asleep with his mail bag for a pillow, and his tired nag tethered to a handy bush munching the few green blades within his reach. He woke up with a start at the sound of approaching footsteps, and sprang to his feet, his hand on his revolver. It was not an unusual thing for the mail carriers to be attacked by some of the lawless bandits who scoured the veldt, especially if they were supposed to carry anything of value with them.

"It's all right," called out Donald cheerily; and with a relieved salutation the mail carrier proceeded to tumble out the contents of his bag unceremoniously on the grass, in order to find the letters addressed to Ruysfontein.

"I only want my own letters," said Donald, watching him with interest. "I'm expecting some rather important business ones, or I might not have troubled you. You'll get to Ruysfontein, I suppose, by five o'clock?"

"It'll be seven, sir, if it keeps as warm as this," replied the mail carrier with a shrug of his shoulders at the burning sky. "Here you are, quite a little pile."

Donald took them in his hand, turning them over carelessly, until he came upon one small square envelope bearing a foreign postmark, and addressed in handwriting which he did not remember to have seen.

He broke the seal hastily, and when he saw the address at the top of the page and the signature at the end, the colour first leaped in his face and then receded from it, leaving it pale as death. He put it in his pocket, and sat down resolutely to deal with his business letters first, guessing perhaps that the contents of this unlooked-for epistle might unfit him for dealing with any other matter.

His business letters were satisfactory, and necessitated no change in his arrangements.

"It's all right, Jan," he said to his faithful Boer, who was standing by eagerly scanning his face. "You can tether the nags for an hour or so and give them a bite. I'll take a rest myself."

So saying he wandered to the farthest tree and sat down behind its trunk, so that his back was to the others. Then he took the precious letter—the first and only one which had found its way to him from those his soul loved. His hand trembled as he smoothed it out, but it grew sterner in its grip ere he reached the end.

This was the letter Fiona had written that November night in the octagon room in the old house of Garrows :—

"DEAR DON,—Uncle wishes me to write to you again, although it seems to be of little use. I have written so often. I was only counting this afternoon as I sat alone in the drawing-room that I had sent you sixteen letters since you went away, and have never had any reply. Sometimes I fear that you must be dead, and then I think that your friends who came here to see the Glen for your sake would have told us ; and yet I cannot believe, Don, that you have entirely forgotten us all. I remember what you said the night you went away, that you would come back one day as soon as it was possible for you to come, and so I go on hoping, although it grows harder year by year. And then people keep telling me you

have entirely forgotten us, and have no wish to be reminded that there is such a place as the Glen and the folk in it. But that, I tell you, Don, I will never, never believe until you tell me yourself. Uncle bids me say that he is sair failed. Indeed, Don, he is a very old man, and both Dr. MacAlister and Roddie have told me that he cannot live long ; that it will be something of a miracle if he gets through this winter. He speaks of you very often, and I know from his face that he thinks of you all the time. Oh, Don, I wish you were here now and could see the great change in Uncle Maclean. He is so gentle and good and dear. We can never love him enough, and when I think that soon he will go away and leave me all alone in this great house of Garrows, my heart is like to break. I'm sure I could not bear it but for Roddie, who is such a comfort to me. He is more than any brother could be. I have told you so often, but I will tell you again—in case by some strange happening all the other letters might have miscarried, and this one fall into your hands—Roddie is a doctor now, and helps his father, and I think he is even a greater favourite in all the glens than the old doctor. But he is just the same as he used to be, Don, and he and I together believe in you, and keep on hoping that you will come back. There is nobody more loyal in the whole wide world than Roddie MacAlister. I told him to-day he was the best fellow in the world.

“ If you should get this, Don, and have not quite forgotten all the old days, I wish you would write—if you can't come—to poor Uncle Maclean. If you saw him with his bent shoulders and poor thin face you would wish you had written long ago. He says that Garrows wants some one to look after it, and that as he has no son but you, you ought to come home and take your place. He has even asked me to say that he is richer, far richer, than you have any idea of, and that if you will only come it will all be yours. I must write down that because he has bidden me ; but I hope that such things will not weigh with you, Don, or you will be a different Don from the one who went away. I should like to write a

great many more things; but it is like going over the same story, and there is always the fear it will be no use, that you will never get it, or that your heart has grown cold to us who still love you so well. Uncle bids me say a word from myself. There is no word I can say, Don, except Come. And now I must say good-bye, for uncle will write a little message to you himself.

“Your loving FIONA.”

Then at the bottom of the page there were the few words which Maclean’s feeble, unsteady hand had tried to write. They were very few and difficult to decipher. Each one seemed to imprint itself in letters of fire on the throbbing heart of the man who read them—

“Dear lad,” it said, “I only wish to say that all that Fiona has written is true, and more. The heart of the old man is hungry for you, and if you will but come back all will be well. One word more which Fiona must not see. Many braw wooers come riding to Garrows in these days, but our maiden will have none of them. Some men when they hear that might think it worth their while to come and ask her why. Come soon then, lad, or at least write a line. When you are an old man yourself you will know that the old do not like to be forgotten.”

There was silence all around on the great veldt. It was the hour when living things languish in the burning heat. The mail carrier and Jan did not even have a word to say to each other, but lay flat on their backs in the shade, staring stupidly up into the green leaves, half asleep and half awake.

Donald Orde sat still with the letter in his hand, looking upon it with a dazed, uncomprehending stare. It was short, and without detail, but it showed up with awful clearness the desolation of the weary years to those waiting hearts in the Glen. The mystery of it

held him for a moment in thrall, and his face grew dark in its despair. He turned the page mechanically and looked it over again. Sixteen letters she said she had written, and this was the first he had received. Where were the others? Into whose hands had they fallen, and why had his miscarried, too? It was evident from Fiona's words, though she did not say so, that not one of the letters he had written had ever reached the Glen. His mouth trembled as he read the pathetic sentences—each one laden with its burden of longing and of mute reproach. Then he saw the blot where the tears had fallen, and his heart seemed to swell within him till his throat was hot and parched, and the pain was more than he could bear. Heart and spirit anguish of the most cruel kind worked their will within him, till the great sweat drops stood upon his brow. He grew more and more baffled and helpless as he sat trying to solve the dark mystery which shrouded all the silent years of his exile. At length a grim and awful shape rose up before him, and he sprang to his feet with a cry.

"God forbid! God in heaven forbid that she should have done this thing. He would not so curse my home!"

Jan Groot, who had transferred to Donald all the faithful devotion he had lavished on Van Ruysler, ever on the alert where his beloved master was concerned, heard the cry, and was next moment at his side.

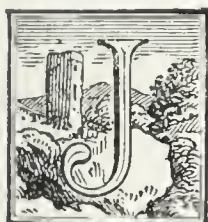
"Sir, you are ill—the heat—maybe we rode too fast——"

"No, Jan," he answered, in a thick, strange voice. "I have had bad news. An evil thing has befallen me—something greater than I can bear. Go back to the nags and leave me. We shall go within the hour."



CHAPTER XIX.

FOUND OUT.



AN crept back anxious and miserable, and sat down in the hollow with his head between his knees. But he had not been there many minutes when his master called to him again

“Saddle up, Jan. We are going back to Ruysfontein,” he said shortly.

“And not to Durban at all?”

“Not to-day. I have news which demands attention at once. Anyhow, it has taken the heart clean out of me, and business must wait. There are matters which I must talk over with your mistress.”

Jan saddled the horses; and the mail carrier, learning of the change in their plans, saddled up also, and they rode together three abreast. Donald never opened his mouth to utter one single word during the five long hours of that weary ride. The mail carrier fell back after a bit—not relishing such hard riding—and having a bag to deliver at a small kraal about ten miles from Ruysfontein, said he would put up there for the night. Donald took no notice, nor did he answer the suggestion that they should carry the remainder of the mail them-

selves to Ruysfontein. He seemed indeed dead for the time being to all that was passing round him.

It was about ten o'clock when they arrived at the kraal, to the great astonishment of those who were still astir. The dogs sent up the usual chorus to the night sky, and Julie looked rather fearfully out of her window at the unusual din. She had not yet begun to undress, but the house doors were all locked and the lights out in the lower rooms. In the bright moonlight she could distinctly discern the figures in the paddock beyond the house, and recognising her husband ran downstairs with beating heart, fearing that some mishap had sent them back. Yet she had seen him walk with steady step towards the house, so no physical harm at least had befallen him, and everything else was of small importance in her eyes. She threw open the door just as he strode up the verandah steps, and when she saw his face a great terror laid hold of her. She had never seen that white, set look, that firm, determined sternness of jaw and chin—and she shrank before him abjectly, as a child who fears punishment for wrongdoing. Donald did not like that cowering; it gave him a new pang, which he had passionately prayed might be spared him. For though they called him the Ne'er-do-weel, truth and honour were dear to him; and the thought that the wife who had lain upon his heart could be guilty of such black treachery was hateful and awful to him.

“What—what has happened, Don?” she cried faintly. “Has there been an accident, or have you been attacked? I am so frightened. Why do you look at me so strangely?”

“Go in, Julie,” he said; and his voice sounded strangely, even to himself. “Go in, and I will tell you if I can.”

He shut the door and followed her into the dining-room, where an awakened servant had hastily placed a lighted lamp.

"We met the mail about fifty miles out, Julie," he said, "and that is what has brought me back."

Then the truth flashed upon her, and an exclamation of dismay and terror broke from her lips. As he heard it and looked upon her shrinking face he knew that he had not erred in his suspicions. He took the letter from his pocket, opened it out, and offered it to her.

"Read that, and tell me, if you can, why none of the sixteen letters she says she has written have ever come into my hands."

"I can't read it, Don," she said, putting it away from her with shaking fingers. "Take it away. What I've lived in daily terror of the last five years has happened, and I can only die." She shrank from him still further, and throwing herself on the end of the couch buried her face in her hands. He looked at her steadily for a moment, but her terror and distress did not soften or move him. He was wondering what kind of a creature this was he had taken to his heart, who could do such cruel and bitter deeds in secret and in silence and yet look up into the faces of those she had betrayed, her own fair and innocent as the dawn.

"I'm waiting," he said ; and the words fell from his parched lips with difficulty. "I'm waiting to hear what the meaning of it all is ; why in God's name you did such a cruel and wicked thing towards those who had never wronged you !"

No answer came from the kneeling figure, but he went on remorselessly—

"When you have read that letter you will see what you have done. There is an old man dying in the

Glen, breaking his heart, Fiona says, because I have never sent him a word ; and all the Glen speaks ill of me because I have so vilely treated those who have never ceased to love me. I hope that you are satisfied with your work. It's black enough. In Heaven's name, will you tell me why you did it ?”

“Yes,” she said, and she flung up her head and looked at him with a calm, steady stare. “I was jealous from the first of their influence over you, and I thought that if you never heard from them nor they from you that you would soon forget. I have often heard that people go to far-off countries and never communicate with their friends again, and no one seems to be hurt. How could I tell that you and they would be so different ?”

“So you intercepted the letters, I suppose, and destroyed them ?” he said slowly.

“Yes. The bag always passed through my hands the last thing before the mail carrier had it. It was very simple, and so I did it.”

“You read them afterwards, I suppose, for your own amusement ?” he said, setting his teeth.

“No, I don't think I did. I'm bad, and perhaps it was only that I was not sufficiently interested to wade through all the sentimental stuff you would write about that horrible outlandish Glen of yours. Anyhow I did not read them. You can believe me or not as you like ; it's true.”

“But the object of it ?” he repeated blankly. “I do not grasp it yet.”

“I suppose not,” she said, with the mocking smile he had not seen on her face for many months. “You are obtuse enough when you like. Since it's open confession we are going in for, I may as well lay it all

bare. I suppose it will not make much difference now. It may seem a little thing to you that a woman should learn to care for a man without, perhaps, much encouragement. That, unfortunately, was my fate. You know me, Don, that I do nothing by halves. If I love, I love. It's all or nothing with me. Therefore, it was a little thing to scheme and plan so that I might win you to myself. It was the only way, and I did it. You have belonged to me at least for one little year."

He looked upon her more wonderingly still ; his heart was as a stone within his breast, and yet there was something in these words, uttered with a calm precision carrying conviction with it, which moved him to some slight compassion ; but he did not suffer it to be seen, for the wrong of which she had been guilty was one which could hardly be righted this side the grave. Who was to atone to the old man and the maiden for their lonely years of waiting and cruel suspense in their far-away home at the head of Garrows Glen ? Or where was he to find compensation for his own intolerable anguish, born of the thought of what might have been ?

"I suppose there is no use asking you to forgive me, Don ?" said his wife presently. "You look like some terrible avenging spirit. All is over between you and me ?"

"There's no use talking like that," he said dully. "When a man has married a wife he is bound to her, unless she of her own free will break the tie. You had better go to bed, Julie. I must be alone to fight this matter out. Perhaps to-morrow some more satisfactory talk will be possible to us, but not now."

She hid her face again, and half-looking at her for a moment he turned about and walked out of the

room and the house. He was in that state when four walls could not hold him. He felt that to stand there listening to what she had to say, or trying to come to any better understanding of her nature, might result in such bitterness as could never afterwards be buried or forgotten.

Out in the silent and fragrant night there was at least the semblance of peace. His steps turned naturally—as they had done many times before—to the little kopje behind the house, and there he sat down alone to think the matter out. He took the letter from his pocket, but did not dare to read it again, nor was there any need. Every word was seared upon his heart, and the misery of it all was more than he could bear. Peace did not come to him; nay, battling with unavailing regret was futile and wretched, and something beyond his strength. The longing for action leaped in his heart—anything, anything, he told himself, was better than to return to the house and to endure the company of his wife when his heart was full of bitterness towards her. He was slow to anger, but when roused it was the deep, fierce anger of the North, which takes long to burn itself out.

She had stolen from him and from Fiona what would have made them happier through the waiting years, and it would take him long to forgive the cruelty of that theft. Feeling that each moment but intensified his suffering, he sprang up and went to the kraal to look for Jan. He was a creature who knew no weariness, and when asked why he was still astir and doing the work of others, he simply replied that he was not sure whether he would be wanted.

“Well I want you, Jan,” said his master. “Saddle up again and let us off to Durban. We can inspan an

hour or two at Muller's and breakfast there. The matter of which I spoke is ended and I am reminded that my business is even more pressing than it was yesterday."

Jan, nothing loth, ran to obey orders, and Donald returned to the house to say a word of good-bye to his wife. She had left the dining-room, and when he sought her upstairs found her lying across the bed.

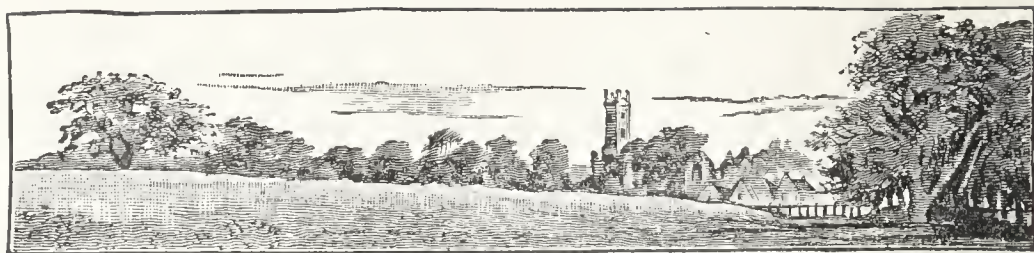
"Julie," he said, trying to speak with gentleness, but his voice had a distant strain in it, "I am off to Durban again; the business is very pressing. Good-bye! I shall try and be back in four days."

She never spoke nor gave any sign that she heard.

"Are you asleep, dear? Well, I won't awaken you. It is well you can sleep," he said, and bending over her touched her hair with his lips.

Then he left her, and as he passed out called to one of the women to go up and see to her mistress. But when the girl went up the door was locked and no heed was given to her knock. Julie Van Ruysler lay there the whole night, staring up into the painted ceiling with eyes which saw nothing, and the bitterness of death was in her soul.

These things were not understood in the household at Ruysfontein, and made much talk. But the worst was not yet.



CHAPTER XX.

TOO LATE.



IN his hotel at Durban, Donald replied to Fiona's letter. He was glad that he was obliged to be brief, as there was only one little hour in which to catch the mail. It was little more than an acknowledgment of the letter he had received, and an assurance that the long silence had not been less painful and terrible to him than it had been to them. He simply said that through an accident, the details of which it was impossible to give in such a hurried note, none of the letters of which she spoke had ever reached him ; nor had those he had written ever left the Colony. He made no mention of his marriage, or of the double part his wife had played. He simply said that he was bound by many ties to his new home, and feared that it would not be possible now to fall in with his uncle's wish. He added, however, that in another week, when he should have considered the whole matter, he might possibly be able to fix a time for a visit to his old home. He was glad to have lack of time as a genuine excuse. It gave him a little respite from the full revelation which would be necessary before everything could be cleared up.

After his letter was gone, he was able to apply himself to the business which had brought him to the coast. It was absolutely necessary indeed that he should so apply himself, because matters were pressing, especially those connected with his mining interests. Van Ruysler had in his will left him a large interest in the diamond mines, so that he had an ample income apart from his wife's. When the effects of the first shock had worn off, some gentler feeling towards Julie began to visit him. She was very young and undisciplined, and lacked any serious experience of life. Then she had erred through love of him, and such sin a man finds it easy to forgive. Donald Orde was a singularly healthy-minded and clear-headed person, entirely free from any inclination to morbid dwelling on the troubles which met him as he journeyed through life. In this respect he differed entirely from Julie, whose life was largely made up of the emotions. She took too little interest in the practical affairs of life, and this lack of responsibility on her part kept her childish in many things even when in others she was quite womanly. Donald Orde fought his battle manfully that night as he rode across the wide spaces of the veldt and through the lonely shadows of the bush.

It had been a hard fight, and proved to him that the love he had for the woman whose life was in his hands, in comparison with his enduring care for Fiona, was as water unto wine. He did not hide it from himself. It was his brave nature to face the worst. The sooner faced the sooner mended was his creed ; and though the knowledge that Fiona was lost to him for ever was full of untold bitterness, he tried to crush it and to take up the threads of life where he had laid them down.

Towards Julie he was well aware he could never feel quite the same. The shadow of her treachery

would be between them now for ever ; yet for the sake of those who had gone, and who so trustfully left her in his care, he vowed in his heart that he would allow no shadow of his suffering to rest on her. In this he proved himself a wise man, since the inevitable must be endured.

Full of these gentler thoughts, and even regretting in some slight degree his harsh words to her and his unceremonious departure from Ruysfontein, he bought for her some of the dainty trifles which he knew would please her, and then, having successfully concluded all the business which had brought him to the coast, he turned his face homeward. They pushed on rapidly, resting only in the heat of the day, and towards sundown on the second afternoon came within sight of Ruysfontein. As they came to the crest of the ridge of low hills which bounded the great stretch of veldt surrounding the homestead, his eyes dwelt with a peculiar melancholy glance on its clustering roofs. It was his home. He was bound to it by ties which nothing but death could sever. There he must live his life, and there, in all probability, soon or late, death would overtake him. It was a position and a life which many envied and some grudged him ; and yet as he thought of the misty Glen shut in by its bare and melancholy hills, of the old grey house among its stunted trees, and of what life might have been for him there, his heart was full to breaking.

Jan rode beside him, sadly noting the full eye and the grave sadness on his master's face. He was only a Boer boy for whom love had done much, but he knew that some great sorrow had befallen his master, and the mute desire of his faithful heart was that he might bear it for him. Donald became conscious in

some strange fashion of this mute sympathy, and he turned to the lad with a slight smile.

‘Home again, Jan,’ he said, trying to speak cheerfully. “It’s a good home to come to. Don’t you think so?”

“Very good, master,” answered Jan, and there was no mistaking the hearty sincerity of his tone, Ruysfontein being to him Paradise on earth.

“Your mistress will scarcely expect us yet. We have been very expeditious. We should be in time for dinner, I think. The nags are a bit tired, however, and we must let them take their own time.”

Jan nodded, and they ambled on easily. About seven o’clock they reached the kraal, where all the folk turned out as usual to meet them. Michael, the English groom, whom Van Ruysler had brought from Durban especially to attend upon Julie, came forward when he saw the two riders enter the paddock, and his face wore a look of dismay amounting to terror. Donald, however, absorbed in his own strange anticipations of his meeting with his wife, did not note his perturbation as he carelessly threw him the reins.

“Well, Michael, everything gone on well? How is your mistress?”

“I thought she’d come back with you. Have you not seen her?” faltered the man, his teeth chattering in his head.

Instantly Donald flashed upon him a lightning glance.

“Come back with me! Where is she? Did you allow her to ride out alone after all the injunctions I laid upon you?” he said, his voice rising in anger.

“Sir, she never asked my leave. It was only this afternoon when I went to water the horses I found White Lady—missus’s pony—gone. That was about three o’clock. I rode out at once to see whether I

could meet her, but no one had seen her leaving except some of the village children, and they said she rode out to meet you. But they tell such lies, sir, you can't believe a word they say."

Donald never uttered a word; a great and mortal terror laid hold of him which he could not put into words.

"Saddle up some fresh horses, Jan," he said in a hoarse voice, "and you, Michael, get some of the others out too, and we'll ride in every direction. If anything has befallen your mistress, my man, it's as much as your life is worth." It was a relief to him to blame some one, although in a juster moment he would have been the first to admit that Michael could not be expected to anticipate and provide for every vagary of his mistress.

While they got out the horses amid rising excitement Donald strode towards the house to inquire whether the indoor servants could throw any light upon her escapade. He tried not to feel unduly alarmed. After all, it was no uncommon thing for her to take a few hours' gallop across the veldt, although she had not indulged in it so often since her father's death. Donald had indeed so often expressed his dislike to these solitary rides that she had almost entirely discontinued them. Still, it was possible that, tired of her solitary condition, and moved, perhaps, by a spirit of contradiction to his will, she had taken an afternoon amusement on her own account. It was even possible that she might have gone to pay a visit at some distant farmhouse without troubling to leave any message. Consideration for other people's feelings had never been Julie's strong point at any time.

He found the household getting anxious, although, like him, not unduly alarmed. The women could tell

him nothing except that they had seen her leaving the house in her riding-habit about three o'clock in the afternoon. He wandered aimlessly through the empty rooms, and somehow the memory of the last time he had seen her, and what had passed between them then, was before him with unpleasant vividness. Every word he had uttered came back to him with keen distinctness, and though they had all been justifiable under the circumstances, he wished he had been less severe. For after all, she was but a child, reared in these wild solitudes by a father and mother who adored her and lived but to gratify her slightest whim. What thought had she of the serious issues of life? what experience of the things which make sorrow and bitterness to endure in the hearts of others? He blamed himself for his harshness with every step he took, until he came at last to the little boudoir—a dainty nest for a dainty bird—which opened out of their bedroom. This room was furnished in English style, the walls hung with blue silk tapestry, and the floor covered with priceless Indian rugs. A piano and escritoire exquisitely inlaid with mother-of-pearl and adorned with delicate pieces of *bric-à-brac* proclaimed the expensive taste of the African millionaire's daughter.

It was in perfect order, only a chair was pushed back from the writing-desk as if some one had risen from it in haste. As his eye lighted upon the dainty writing-case all covered with filigree work, he saw lying upon it a closed envelope, and his heart stood still as he observed it addressed to himself. A sickening dread laid hold of him. Strong man though he was, his hand trembled as he broke the seal.

Thus did Julie take leave of her home and the husband she so passionately loved.

"You will remember," it began, "that I said to you long ago I should not live after you had ceased to care for me. I have tried to think what life will be like when you come back and are cold to me, looking at me with the eyes which slew me the day the letter came. I have got so confused and despairing thinking about it that I see no way but to end it as quickly and surely as possible. Perhaps when I am dead you will think more kindly of me, and even when you are happy with your Fiona you will sometimes remember the little African girl who could not live because your love had gone from her."

For a moment the full significance of these fatal words did not come home to Donald Orde. He looked at them stupidly, noting each graceful, fanciful curve of the handwriting he had so often admired. It had evidently been penned by no trembling hand, and if she had gone to her death she had gone deliberately, of set purpose, and with no hint of wavering or fear.

A minute later he was out among the men with the horses; like a madman in his agony, lashed with the fury of his own helplessness—not knowing where to turn. The face of Jan Groot—tender, sympathetic, full of grave concern—seemed to steady him, and he thrust his letter into his hands.

"Jan, read that, and in God's name tell me what to do."

The faithful Boer made it out with difficulty, and then turned to the horses.

"We will go first to Lake Lokani," he said. "Will you come, master, or shall I ride alone?"

"No, I shall come—but why?"

Lokani was a great and lonely lake distant five and



“THEY RODE TOGETHER LIKE DESPERATE CREATURES.” [Page 163.]

twenty miles by the wildest of bush tracks across the veldt.

"Once I rode there with madame—in the long ago, sir," answered the Boer, with reluctance. "And she was greatly taken with it. She lingered long among the trees on its bank and asked a great many questions."

"What kind of questions?" asked Donald, and the chill of the grave was at his heart.

"Of its depth and whether there were crocodiles or other creatures in it. I said no man had ever seen one there, and that some said no living thing was to be found in its waters; also that no man had ever fathomed it—all that is true, master."

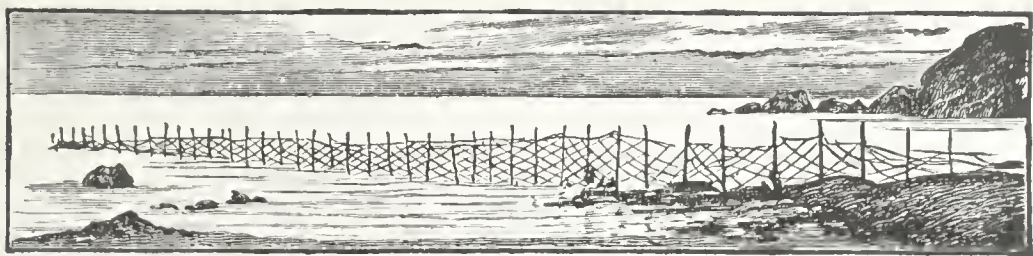
"What did she say to that?"

"She looked at it lingeringly and with a look I did not like. She said it fascinated her, and that when she was tired of life she would seek the green and quiet rest of Lokani."

Then Donald got on his horse without a word, and they rode together like desperate creatures to the dark solitudes of the bush, where the waters of the great white lake shimmered in awful majesty under the weird light of the moon. Dense woods surrounded it, in which the jackal and other wild creatures had their home; and strange tropical trees and creeping things with flaming blossoms on them grew down to the precipitate banks of the silent waters. The whole air seemed to sicken with the rich, heavy perfumes from a thousand unseen flowers. The place and the influences of the midnight hour, and the awfulness of the dread which had him in thrall, caused Donald Orde to tremble as if he were old and infirm and his nerves had lost their power. But Jan was alert and eager, and had all his wits about him. He knew the place well, and with

unerring instinct he guided his master, leading the horses by the head through the thick undergrowth, till he came to an open space for which he sought. And as he emerged from the grim shadows he saw something lying on the bank which blanched his face and set his teeth chattering in his head. It was a bright bit of colour made by a woman's silk scarf, a dainty yellow thing which Julie had often wound about her head of an evening when she would go for a stroll or canter across the veldt. It hung entangled on the broad white leaves of a prickly pear tree which overhung the bank and seemed to tell its own dreary tale.

"Look, master, look!" cried Jan, and when Donald saw it he staggered like a drunken man and fell face downward on the sward.



CHAPTER XXI.

ALL OVER.



WHILE his master lay prostrate on the ground Jan carefully examined the bank of the lake to see if he could find any trace of struggle or footmark, but none were to be seen. On the stump of a dead tree, however, he found a portion of a pony's bridle, and sorrowfully shook his head. The whole occurrence was as plain and simple to Jan as if he had witnessed it with his own eyes. She had tied White Lady to the tree, and then left her scarf as a mute message of farewell before she took the fatal plunge. The animal, tired of waiting, had at length broken from his tether, and was probably by this time neighing outside his own kraal at Ruysfontein. There was not the slightest doubt in the mind of Jan that his mistress now slept beneath the cruel shining waters of the great white lake. He even peered across the overhanging brushwood expecting to discern something floating on its breast ; but nothing disturbed the calm of its still, mysterious waters ; they kept their secret well.

He moved back at length to his master's side, holding in his hand the broken bridle-rein.

"It is no use staying here, master," he said disconsolately. "Let us go home."

Donald sat up and raised his white face to the sympathetic eyes of his servant.

"What do you think then, Jan ; is there any hope?"

The Boer shook his head and held out the piece of leather he had found. Donald took it in his hand almost stupidly, and a groan broke from his lips. Suddenly he sprang up and turned his eyes on the lake.

"If she is there, Jan, we must find her. I shall never rest until I have seen with my own eyes that there is no hope."

But again Jan shook his head.

"How is it to be done, master?" he asked. "There is no boat here, and even if we had a boat, of what good would it be—how could we reach the bottom?"

"There is an apparatus for the purpose of sounding even deep waters, Jan, and I will not rest until I find her, or prove beyond a doubt that she is not here."

Jan said nothing, but his face betrayed the hopelessness of his view. He could not utter the conviction which was in his heart—that probably by this time the fair body of his mistress had become the prey of the strange creatures who had a home in the silent and unsounded depths.

Donald carried his resolve into execution. Men and boats and grappling apparatus were brought up at enormous expense and trouble from the coast, and days were spent trying to probe these vast depths, but without avail. Nothing was found but strange plants and undergrowth, and creatures the like of which had never been seen ; no trace was found of the young lady of Ruysfontein, and at last the men ceased their efforts and said nothing more could be done.

It made a great talk in the Colony, where the name of Van Ruysler was so widely known, and Donald was the recipient of a great deal of sympathy on the one hand, and of some suspicion in other quarters where his great good fortune had been envied and grudged. But after a time the talk died down, as something more recent and exciting took its place, and Donald Orde was left to live his lonely and solitary life at Ruysfontein—a prey to the anguish of memory and regret.

It was natural that he should exaggerate his own conduct, and that he should blame himself unduly for his share in the tragic end to his young wife's life, and it was all the harder to bear that he had not one to whom he could confide his melancholy or help him to rise above the depressing circumstances in which he found himself.

Business in plenty he had to attend to, and he threw himself into it heart and soul, taking a personal supervision of everything connected with the estate—riding to its utmost limits, and personally inspecting its most distant stations. But all this exertion and expenditure of energy were powerless to soften the deep melancholy which held him in thrall. His faithful Boer watched him with the keen, never-sleeping anxiety born of a great love, and when he saw him an altered and melancholy man, aged before his time, a deep depression laid hold of Jan Groot likewise. For he was convinced that unless there came some lightening of the load on his master's mind he must either die, or that some calamity worse than death would overtake him.

After a time Donald began to have a great longing to return to his native land. The immense wealth which Van Ruysler had accumulated lay untouched,

increasing month by month. For such a keen and shrewd business man, Van Ruysler had exhibited singularly little foresight or wisdom in his dispensation of his vast means. With the exception of the various shares which had been bequeathed to Donald Orde, he had left his daughter his sole heiress and executrix, without mention of any provision in the case of her death. So far as Donald knew, he had no relatives either in the Colony or in the homeland from which he had come. If Julie were really dead, of which indeed there could now be no doubt, the great estate with its attendant millions belonged to Donald himself; but the thought was hateful to him. He felt as if he had so poorly requited the boundless trust Van Ruysler had placed in him that he had no right to a coin of the money, which was indeed in itself without value in his eyes. His own needs were few and simple, and when he thought of the matter at all he had some vague idea of sending the great revenues of Ruysfontein to swell the empty coffers of some of the charitable institutions which were constantly crying for aid.

He dwelt three months in lonely solitude at Ruysfontein, and then the place became so intolerable to him, and the longing to go home so strong and imperative, that he suddenly wrote to Cape Town, taking out a passage in a homeward-bound steamer, and then began the few preparations needful for an absence of considerable duration.

It pleased Jan to hear that his master at length contemplated a change, but the idea of being left at Ruysfontein without master or mistress, or anything to make the place tolerable or home-like, did not commend itself to the Boer. He chose what he thought a

favourable moment to approach the request which had been trembling on his lips for days.

"You will take me, master?" he said abruptly, yet with a subdued eagerness which indicated that it was a matter of serious moment to him.

Donald looked surprised and shook his head.

"It will be winter when we get there, Jan; the cold and the snows would kill you."

The Boer shook his head.

"Not so fast nor so surely as to live here without you, master," he answered. "Besides, who will wait upon you and attend to your horses and keep everything just as you like it if I am not there?"

Donald sadly smiled.

"I shall not have many horses there, Jan; we are poor in Scotland, and are not used to the luxuries of Ruysfontein. I shall miss you, lad; but you will take care of the place in my absence, and I shall not be long gone."

But Jan would not be set aside.

"What is there for me to do here when you are gone?" he asked impatiently. "Doort and Michael and Wilhelm—are they not sufficient? There will be no work for us to do at this season, and we shall be like so many fat cattle eating our heads off in the kraals. Take me, master—I will earn my passage rather than be left. I can't leave you."

The tears started involuntarily to Donald's eyes, but in his desolate, heart-sick condition such devotion was sweet and priceless to him. He held out his hand and clasped Jan's with a clasp of brotherly devotion.

"When you put it like that I can't refuse, Jan. You shall go and see for yourself the country across the sea,

which those who are her sons and daughters never forget. It will be something, after all, to have your kind heart and willing hands to fall back on if there should arise a time of need."

So Donald Orde turned his back on the land of his adoption and his face towards the land of his birth. His thoughts as he rode away from Ruysfontein in the still dusk of an early morning before the sun was up were too deep for words. Seven years since that glorious night when the bullock waggon from Durban had lumbered up to the kraals, and the astonished lad had opened his eyes wide in wonder over the strange novelty of his surroundings! Seven long years, which had changed him from a boy to a man! To some seven years pass uneventfully—unmarked by any change, scarcely by any development of character or of events. But it was far otherwise with Donald Orde. Whatever the future might hold for him, the mark left by these years would never be effaced. Nay, their tragic close had lined his face and turned his bright hair grey, as in a single night. He had come there a lad with the face of the morning and the joy of youth in his heart—he left it a solitary and miserable man, with the weight of a terrible sorrow in his heart, every thought tinged with the bitterness of an unavailing regret.

That he blamed himself unduly we know, and that he dwelt unnecessarily on the most painful side of the tragedy which had befallen him we admit, but how could it be otherwise? To have taken it lightly would have shown a callousness unworthy of him.

Many things perplexed Jan as he rode by his master's side, but one thing was certain and plain to him, that his young mistress was mourned with no common mourning, and the mystery of it all baffled

the Boer's faithful heart and made him wonder why the Great Creator could let such things be.

"God knows when you and I shall see the place again, Jan," said his master, turning in his saddle ere the clustering kraals of the prosperous homestead were lost to view. "God knows indeed whether we shall ever see it. Have you faced that, Jan—a last parting? Perhaps I shall never come back."

"It is well, master, if you let me be with you," Jan answered; but there was that in his face which Donald could read and understand, and his own eyes were not dry as he swiftly turned his head and gave his horse the rein.



CHAPTER XXII.

ONCE MORE.



RODDIE MACALISTER had had a tiring day. He had been called before daybreak to a little sheiling among the hills, and on his return at breakfast-time was reminded by a peremptory summons that he was required to attend before the magistrates at Perth to give evidence in an assault case which had ended fatally to one of the hawkers who had engaged in the fray. There was nothing for it but to ride down with what haste he could to catch the forenoon train ; but he did it with a very bad grace, for there was a long visiting list which would entail far more work than his father could accomplish in a day. Then the snow was beginning to fall in those thin, fine flakes which country folks call a feeding storm. However, Roddie was not of a grumbling nature ; and after one brief if rather strong expression of his dissatisfaction, he set out manfully to do his duty. He was not long delayed by the magistrates, and had still time to do a little shopping for his mother before the Highland train started late in the afternoon.

There were not many passengers anxious to visit the

north in the middle of a snow storm. Roddie sauntered up and down the platform puffing away contentedly at his pipe, thinking, as he noticed the scarcity of travellers, that it would hardly pay the company to run the train. On a platform comparatively deserted, it was natural that his attention should be arrested by any striking or distinguished-looking person.

When the train from the south for which they waited steamed into the platform, he regarded it with interested curiosity in the hope that he might chance to see some one he knew to join his journey. He saw a very tall, broad-shouldered man jump from a first-class carriage, followed by a lithe, slender, dark-skinned young fellow, who appeared to be his personal attendant—at least he busied himself with the luggage. The stranger wore a heavy overcoat trimmed with fur, and a cap drawn so far down over his eyes that very little of his face could be seen. Wondering to which of the great houses the distinguished-looking stranger was bound, Roddie continued to watch his movements with interest. When the luggage was transferred from the one train to the other, the stranger passed quite close by Roddie, and they looked each other straight in the face. They both gave a strange start, and Roddie almost gasped, for there was something oddly familiar in the straight, clear, steady gaze of those fine dark eyes. The stranger was the first to speak.

“Roddie MacAlister?” he said, with a tremor in his voice, which, however, could not wholly disguise its familiar tone.

“You can’t be Don—Donald Orde, and yet you can’t be anybody else,” he said, a trifle unsteadily. Then their hands met in a grip which made their pulses tingle, and they looked silently (but with eyes which

spoke) into each other's faces. Before there was time for further speech the guard shouted to them to take their places. Donald threw open the door of a first-class carriage and bundled Roddie unceremoniously in, at the same time giving Jan a hasty order to remain in the next carriage until he was told to come out.

The compartment into which the old friends found themselves was empty, and they sat down without a word, staring stupidly at each other, both with the same thoughts in their hearts that there was so much to say it was impossible to know how or where to begin."

"You're changed," said Robbie at last. "By Jove, you are changed! I shouldn't have known you but for your voice. Why, you look forty if you look a day—and what, in Creation's name, has happened to your hair?"

Donald had pushed back his cap, so that the havoc wrought by the tragedy of his life was plainly revealed.

"A lot has happened to me, Roddie, to account for that," he answered; "but it's not a story to be told here. Oh, man, it warms my heart to see you, and I don't feel as if I wanted to do anything but sit and look my fill at you."

Then, to Roddie's amazement and no small distress, his old friend suddenly covered his face with his hands and a sob broke from his lips, while between his long, slender fingers the great tears dropped. * This was more than the soft heart of Roddie MacAlister could stand.

"Oh, hang it all, Don, drop that!" he said, his own voice a trifle unsteady, his heart full of remorse for the hard thoughts which in time past he had cherished against his friend. "It's a bit rough on a fellow coming back, I suppose, but don't be a woman over it altogether."

There was silence for a few minutes then, but by-and-by Donald regained his self-control, and sat up with

a faint smile, which somehow seemed worse to Roddie than his womanish tears, because it was a smile in which there was neither joy nor sweetness—nothing but pathos of the most heart-breaking kind.

“Tell me how they are at Garrows,” he said at length. “And let me down as gently as you can, Roddie. I don’t think I can bear very much just yet.”

“There isn’t anything much to tell,” answered Roddie. “Maclean is just about the same.”

“He is still living, then?” cried Donald, with a great relief in his tone.

“Yes. I never thought we should get him warstled through last winter, but here he is at the beginning of another, and as likely to live as any of us.”

“And Fiona?” said Donald, and there was no mistaking the vibrating tenderness of his voice.

“Oh, she’s all right. They’ve both been a lot happier and brighter since they got your letter.”

“They did get it then?” said Donald, with a faint eagerness.

“Oh yes, they got it all right enough. I say, Don, that was a queer thing about them all going missing. I suppose some rascal or other was at the bottom of it. It wants a lot of redding up. I suppose you’ll tell us all about it now you’ve come.”

“Some day—not just yet, Roddie,” said Donald. “It had something to do with the change you see in me, and it’s a story that’ll not bear too much handling, but I will tell you some day.”

Roddie held his peace, and pondered many things in his heart. This was not the Donald Orde who went away with the sunshine of the morning on his face, and the springing of eternal hope in his breast; but a sad and broken man, who had beyond a doubt been

through the deepest waters of life. Again poor Roddie cursed himself for his harsh judgment in the days that were gone.

"It was rough on us, Don, and we were hard put to it, Fiona and me, to keep the lamp of our faith burning."

"If you love me, Roddie, don't expatiate on that," cried Donald, almost fiercely. "The thought of it has hardly been absent from me night nor day since I got her letter. Let's speak of other things till I get calmed down a bit. How are your father and mother and all the rest? Tell me about the folk that it's safe for me to name by name."

Roddie made no answer, but looked with his honest eyes, strangely dim, through the window upon the rapidly whitening world.

"You're just in time, Don; we'll have a big drift from Dalnaspidal up to the Brig when the wind rises as sure as fate. To-morrow you might have arrived to find the roads impassable to man and beast. They don't know you are coming at Garrows, I suppose?"

"No they don't. Do you think there'll be a welcome for the wanderer there?"

"Wheest, Donald, wheest, for God's sake don't be a bigger fule than ye can help. It was not this kind of home-coming you and I thought of the morning we clasped hands on the old Brig. But still it's better than no home-coming at all; and it may be that after you've been at Garrows a while among your ain folk matters will mend."

Roddie MacAlister was not without his own share of sharp curiosity concerning the strange things that had befallen Donald Orde in the distant land, but he saw that the time had not yet come. By some strange subtlety of spirit Donald seemed to divine his unspoken thoughts.

"Fiona must hear the story first, Roddie; it is her right. Oh, man, what it is to see you again, and to feel the snell blast of a Northern winter. I would to God I had never left it all!"

"Oh, but it will mend," re-echoed Roddie, with just a touch of impatience in his voice; the sadness of his friend's look and tone, and the evident weight which rested on his heart vexed him almost beyond endurance. "I hope you won't carry such a long face as that up to Garrows, or I shall have the old man on my hands with sheer fright."

"You don't think that my unexpected arrival will do him any harm, do you?"

"No, certainly not. It will do him good if you go in in any kind of decent fashion. I'll take you up myself after you've had your tea at the Brig and given my father and mother a shake of your hand. They'll be very glad to see you, Donald. Nobody has ever taken your place in any of their hearts since you went away. It's a wonder that you come back to find Fiona still Fiona Forbes," said Roddie presently, "and I don't think you deserve it. You won't have heard I suppose, that it's not so long ago since she gave Hamish Chisholme his right about face, and a mad man was he over it I can tell you. He'll be madder still when he hears you've come back, I'm thinking."

Suddenly Donald leaned forward in his seat and looked his old friend straightly in the face.

"Roddie," he said, almost solemnly, "when you hear the story I have to tell, you will know that there is nothing on earth can hurt me more than such words as these you are saying about Fiona. Till then spare me if you can, for I have already gotten almost more than I can bear."

Then Roddie's honest eyes grew dark with the rebelliousness of his own thought.

"What for have you come back, then?" he cried angrily. "It would have been better for you if you had bidden where you were."

"If you think that, Roddie, I'll go back yet," answered Donald with unexpected humility. "I believe you are right; I had better bidden where I was to dree my weird as best I could."

"Oh, shut up," cried Roddie savagely. "I don't know what I'm saying, and that's the truth. It's enough to make a fellow swear to sit and listen to you and to think of what might and ought to have been."

Then they tried to talk of things which were of less personal moment; but gradually each relapsed into silence, and sitting in opposite corners peered out into the steady, soft falling snow.

The Highland train, always leisurely in its movements, seemed to crawl up the hills, and it was quite dark when it drew up at Dalnaspidal. Nobody alighted there but Donald and Roddie and Jan Groot.

"Who's your friend?" Roddie asked with interest, having forgotten his existence until he saw him alight.

"A Boer chap, a very decent, faithful fellow, Roddie. He wouldn't leave me, though I told him our glens would kill him. How are we to get up?"

"Oh, I can take you easily. I drove down the dog-cart myself, and stabled the beast in John Tosh's byre," answered Roddie blithely. "Rather ask how you would have got up but for me. Did you think there would be a posting-house at Dalnaspidal now?"

"I never thought about it at all, to tell the truth," answered Donald. "It was very stupid, I see now;

but if you will take Jan, I can tramp it, Roddie. I think I could find my way even yet."

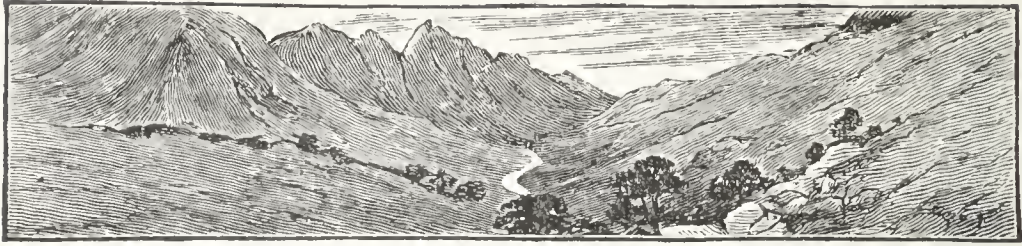
"I daresay you could, but there's no need. The beast's quite fresh, and we'll get another at the Brig to take you up to Garrows. We've five in the stable just now, and none too many for the work."

"Fiona told me in the letter I had that you were greatly in request, and I don't wonder at it," said Donald simply.

"Shut up," answered Roddie, with the same subdued savageness which was the outcome of a genuine ache at his heart. For this was a different Donald Orde from the one who had gone away, and Roddie would rather have seen him return full of airs and pride, for then he might have had a run at him, and by dint of manful strife brought him back to his proper senses. But with this meek and melancholy man nothing could be done, and the bitter sorrow of Garrows over the sad change was ever before his vision.

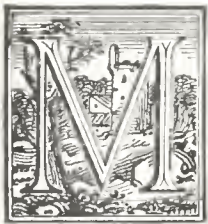
"You're well clad, Don, anyhow—fit for the Arctic regions. What a toff you are," he said, with a twinkle in his eye as he laid his finger on the rich sable cuff and then pulled up his own cape of Harris tweed about his ears. "I suppose you've come back a bloated aristocrat, rolling in gold, eh?"

"There's plenty of gold, certainly, more than I shall ever spend," was the unexpected answer. "But I'd give every shilling of it, Roddie, cheerfully, if I could go back to the day you and I ran away from Perth."



CHAPTER XXIII.

THE EXILE'S RETURN.



MACLEAN and Fiona were dining as usual in the octagon room when a loud double knock came to the hall door.

"That's Roddie MacAlister's knock, uncle," cried Fiona in surprise. "What can he want here at this time of night, and in a snow storm, too?"

"We'll soon see," answered Maclean, as Farquharson hurried out of the room to open the door. Fiona, listening with strained ears, heard a hurried whispering, and then Farquharson returned with a scared look on his face.

"It's the young doctor, sir, and a gentleman with him; could he speak to you for a minute?"

"Certainly, certainly," said Maclean, rising to his feet. "I hope you have not left them standing in the hall, Farquharson?"

"I have, sir, the fire is very good," said Farquharson, in a hurried, unsteady voice; "but I'll bring them in."

Before the words were out of his mouth Roddie MacAlister's homely face appeared in the doorway, and Farquharson evidently in a high state of nervousness quickly made his exit, closing the door behind him.

"What is the meaning of all this, Doctor?" asked Maclean, a trifle irritably, "and who have you brought with you and left so unceremoniously out in the hall? Bring him in."

"Presently, presently," said Roddie, nervously too; but it was at Fiona he looked. "I don't suppose you have any idea who it is? Donald has come back."

Fiona went white as the delicate lace at her throat, and Roddie saw her stretch out her slim hand and rest it on the table, as if she wanted its support.

"Donald come back!" shouted Maclean, "and you have left him standing in the hall! I will e'en bring him in myself." So saying, the old man positively ran to the door and threw it open, and there was Donald standing beside the old-fashioned oak fireplace, where the logs cracked merrily. A great, tall, handsome fellow, in whom Maclean found it difficult for a moment to trace any likeness to the lad who had gone away.

"Well, uncle," said Donald, and he was not ashamed of the emotion which mastered him, making further speech impossible. The old man placed both his frail hands on the young one's tall shoulders and seemed to cling there, looking into his face with a wistful, eager look which was full of questioning.

"Ay, my lad, so you have come back, and a braw man ye are. I can't believe that ye are truly Donald Orde."

"He has grown, hasn't he?" said Roddie's pleasant voice in the doorway; and somehow they felt glad of that timely interruption, the tension of the meeting being very great.

"Fiona, where are you?" cried the old man with trembling eagerness. "Why don't you come and welcome him back, after all the way we have longed

and mourned for him? Is that the way to greet him now he is come?"

"I'm here, uncle," said Fiona's voice very low. "I waited until you had spoken with him first."

Then Donald stepped forward and took in his the dear hand held out to him with a smile, whose sweetness warmed his chilled heart and yet filled it with bitterness which could never be told, for he knew now—and his hungry eyes dwelt on that pure and noble face—that it was the realisation of all his highest and purest dreams. Before him stood the one perfect woman—the only woman on earth for him—now, alas! lost to him for ever.

Fiona was not less deeply moved, but she was able to exercise a quiet control over herself, and though her lips were trembling she bade him welcome home in the same steady, sweet tones which were as music in the wanderer's ears.

"Now that I have delivered him safely up," said Roddie joyously, "I will be gone. So good-night to you all, and don't keep them up till midnight, Donald, with your talk. Remember that however interesting it may be that you have a long day before you to-morrow. I will come up before lunch and see if you have obeyed the doctor's orders."

It was not to be wondered at perhaps that in the tremulous excitement of the moment they did not press Roddie to remain. The doing of kind and helpful deeds was so conspicuously a part of Roddie MacAlister's life that perhaps people had learned to accept his services as a matter of course. Anyhow they let him go, and he was conscious as he turned his horse's head down the snowy road of a sense of loneliness and isolation which had a touch of bitterness in it, for in the little

circle he had left he had no place, and fate had decreed that he should stand upon the outside always, and be a witness to, rather than a sharer in the joy of others.

After the first excitement of the meeting was over, Fiona was conscious of a sense of restraint so intense as to be almost painful. Perhaps her own pent feelings had something to do with it, and she was glad to steal away for a few moments on the pretence of seeing that a room was prepared for the unexpected guest. There was no one in the great, wide hall when she slipped out of the octagon room, and, leaning up against the quaint carved supports of the mantelshelf, she gave way for a moment to the agitation which had been struggling for the mastery. A little sob broke from her lips and some tears fell. She could not tell whether they were tears of joy or sorrow. Her heart had seemed to stand still indeed for the moment, as her eyes sadly noted the great change in the hero and idol of her girlish dreams. Donald Orde's image had dwelt faithfully in her constant heart : never for a moment had it been absent or forgotten. Her quick discernment had told her that the years of his exile had held some terrible stress or strain. It is no light sorrow nor gentle care which leaves so indelible a mark, and there also weighed upon her a strange dread of the future—a dread which was to dwell with her in a greater or less degree for many years to come.

Macleane, almost childish in his impatient eagerness to hear everything that had transpired in the years of Donald's exile, and more especially some fuller explanation of his long silence, was not disposed to give him a moment's respite.

"Your letter said so little, lad," he said quickly. "It only made us want to know a great deal more."

How was it the other letters all went wrong? It seems a strange, inexplicable kind of thing. Tell me all about it."

"It's a long story, uncle," answered Donald, "and if you would give me a little respite I would rather not tell it to-night. I'm tired; and the mingled joy and pain of this home-coming fills all my heart. Let me be quiet this one night."

Maclean acquiesced, but did not look entirely satisfied.

"It's only your voice that makes me feel sure it is you, lad," he said, looking with critical keenness at Donald's altered face and grey hair. "What kind of a life can it be out there to change a man so in a few years' time? Why, your hair is greyer than mine, and you are not five-and-twenty."

"Perhaps you will understand it better after you have heard the story I have to tell, uncle," answered Donald, with some slight weariness in his voice. "I can never be sufficiently grateful to Heaven for permitting me to see you in life again. You are changed, too, but not so much as I expected."

"I am better this year than I have been for a long time, thanks to Roddie MacAlister. He has fell skill as a doctor, Donald, and is far before his father, although I would be the last man to say it to his face. But where's that lassie gone? You have not said what you think of Fiona, Donald."

"I don't need," answered Donald, with a slight constraint in his voice. "I think of Fiona as I have always thought."

"But don't you think she has improved?" asked the old man persistently—"in looks I mean. I think myself she is the handsomest lass in the Glen, and there are some that have thought the same; but she

has never looked at a man among them, Donald, though many have sought her since you went away."

"She no doubt prefers to remain at Garrows to minister to you, uncle. You would not do well without her."

"No, I should do very ill," admitted Maclean. "But with all my faults I am not so far left to myself that I would expect a young lassie to remain single for ever to look after me. It is not to be expected from flesh and blood, Donald, and I'm not expecting it. I'd like you to understand that."

"I daresay Fiona understands it too," said Donald, willing to humour him so as to keep him from more personal themes.

"I have sometimes thought," continued the old man, betraying his deep interest in the subject—"I have sometimes thought that she and Roddie MacAlister were rather thick, but one day when I taxed her with it she just laughed in my face. 'Why, uncle,' she said, 'what can you be thinking of? Roddie is just Roddie, and will never be anything else.'"

"Roddie MacAlister is a fine chap," said Donald warmly, "and any woman might do worse."

"Ay, that's true, but he will not suit our Fiona evidently," said Maclean drily. "Well, now, I hope that you've come to bide, Donald, because if you've not it would have been better for us all if you had bidden where you were."

"I'll stay a bit anyhow, uncle," answered Donald. "I've nothing calling me back in a hurry."

"You fell on your feet out there," said the old chief, with musing interest. "I suppose you have come back a rich man?"

"Yes, I suppose I have," answered Donald, but

carelessly, as if the matter was of no moment to him. "In fact, I've more money than I shall ever spend in this world. But that's nothing; money can't buy happiness, uncle, or peace of mind."

"It helps though," said Maclean shrewdly. "It's a gey puir struggle without it. Perhaps now that you're such a great man you'll not be caring for Garrows and the simple life here?"

Donald rose to his feet and took a turn or two across the floor.

"Uncle," he said, pausing before him, his face grave and sad and stern, "I would give every penny I possess, ay, and twenty years of my life, if I could go back and be a lad again fishing in the Garrows burn, and with no more care than I had then."

"Toots, lad, hold your tongue. I dinna like to hear you speak with such bitterness. You have not been treated that ill in the new country; and though maybe bairn days are the happiest, manhood has its compensations."

Before Donald could reply the door was softly opened and Fiona came in again. Her face was very pale, but she had washed the traces of tears from her eyes, and her smile was sweet as she looked upon her uncle's face.

"You'll sleep sound to-night, uncle, and I think it is time you went to bed. Your room is warm and comfortable, and Farquharson is waiting for you."

"See how she orders the old man about," said Maclean; and his rare delight in her gentle tyranny seemed to Donald one of the most touching and exquisite things he had seen. "She bids me to my bed as though I were a bairn, and she my mother."

"But it's for your good, uncle, and Roddie says you must be in your bed every night at nine. Just look.

It's nearly ten now, and as he said, to-morrow is a long day ; there will be plenty of time to speak."

"That's true," said Maclean, rising without hesitation, for he was still so frail that his strength seemed to go from him at the close of the day. "Maybe you'll come in and see me after I'm in my bed, Donald, for though I'm there I'm not asleep, and won't be till the clock strikes twelve."

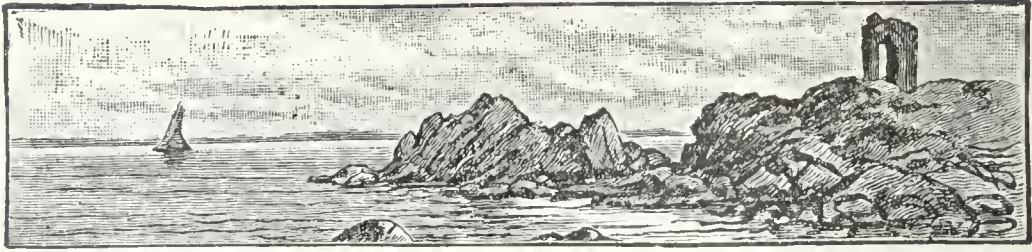
"Yes, I'll come now and help you," said Donald, rising and offering his strong young arm to guide his uncle's tottering steps.

"Well, I don't mind your arm to the door, but Farquharson winna like it if you take his work from him," said Maclean ; and the tears rushed involuntarily to Fiona's eyes as she saw the two pass out of the room, Donald so gently and tenderly guiding the feeble steps of the old man whose one prayer had been that he might live to look again upon his face.

When Donald returned to the room Fiona was standing where he had left her, with her white, slim hand resting on the dark oak of the mantelshelf and her dainty foot on the steel bar of the fender. His heart went out to her in a rush of passionate love which almost overwhelmed him.

"You find a great change in us, Donald," she said, turning her head with a swift, keen glance. "Perhaps as great a change as we see in you."

He made no answer, good or bad, but throwing himself into the chair which stood before the table, he flung out his arms and buried his face upon them.



CHAPTER XXIV.

THE EXILE'S TALE.



FINNA stood erect and still upon the hearth-rug looking at him, and her face was as the face of an angel in its pity. She never forgot that moment, in which the pain of a lifetime seemed to be pressed into a breathing space. The unspoken dread which had so long dwelt with her seemed all at once to take definite shape. She saw in the distress of the man before her the prostration of self-abasement, and believed that he had come back, if not unworthy, at least touched with the shame some in the Glen had made such haste to lay upon him. There is in all the world no keener anguish to the faithful heart than to behold the idol broken at its feet.

It was a long time before words could come to her, but at length she stepped to the table and laid her gentle hand lightly on his shoulder.

"I am sorry for you, Don," she said simply. "You are greatly changed, and it is easy to see that you have suffered much. Perhaps some day you will tell me, and it will be easier to bear. You remember when we were boy and girl together in Garrows how quickly our little troubles flew when we told them to each other."

"I will tell you now, Fiona, if you will hear me," said Donald ; but he did not look at her, although her very touch thrilled him.

"Of course I will hear, if it will not pain you too much. I can wait. That is the use of old friends, Donald, they can wait long and think no evil."

She did not intend it for a reproach, but in his highly strung and nervous condition each word seemed pointed with a double meaning to Donald Orde.

"I deserve everything you can say, perhaps, but when you have heard what I have to tell you will know that I am not the only sufferer."

Something in these words chilled Fiona, and she stepped back to the hearth and sat down quietly in the old-fashioned grandfather chair which was her uncle's favourite seat. She looked very slight and slender in the great depths, but there was a strength and a power in her face which amazed Donald as he looked. With all her sweetness, Fiona was without doubt a woman of strong character, and one who would not be satisfied with the smaller things of life. He remained seated at the table, on which he rested his clenched hand. The task before him was no light one, but he must go through with it manfully, and that before he should seek sleep under the old roof-tree.

"It will be eight years, Fiona, eight years on the fifteenth of February next since the day I went away," he began.

"Yes," she answered in an even, passionless voice, "eight years."

"It is a long time, and a lot can happen to a man in eight years. What has happened to me might well have been spread over a lifetime ; but I will be as brief in the telling as I can."

She inclined her head, and somehow speech became more and more difficult to her, and the fear of what she was to hear gripped more heavily at her heart.

"I will begin at the beginning," he said steadily. "No doubt Mr. M'Donald told you all that happened to me till the hour he left me that day at the dock at Tilbury. I was very lonely on the great ship at first, but soon found a friend in the man who shared my cabin, a Dutch settler from Natal named Van Ruysler.

"Yes," said Fiona with a nod. "The same gentleman who visited the Glen with his daughter four summers ago."

"He was very kind to me, befriending me in every possible way, and taking the greatest interest in my plans and prospects. As a matter of fact, Fiona, I had neither plans nor prospects, but was simply a waif waiting for the turn of the tide. When we came to Cape Town he asked me whether I had any objections to going home with him. He frankly said that he had taken a fancy to me, and that as he had a large farm up on the borders of Orange Free State I might as well find something to do there as anywhere else.

"You may be sure that I was grateful for such a chance. I saw well enough that a fellow with neither trade nor occupation at his fingers' ends, and no money in his pockets, is not likely to make much headway in a new country ; and but for Van Ruysler it is probable that I should have drifted down to the lowest strata, and been found among the loafers who abound in their thousands."

"No, no," cried Fiona. "That could never have happened to you, Donald."

"It is what would have happened to me beyond a doubt but for Van Ruysler's timely kindness," said

Donald quickly. "It is very easy for those dwelling at home at their ease to pass their judgment on such as go out to seek their fortune in distant lands and who fail to find it. I have often wished that some wise, strong, and experienced pen would write the true story of the emigrant, who is tossed upon the sea of colonial life, just like a ship of unknown waters without rudder or compass or steering gear of any kind. The consequences are about equally disastrous. Well, then, I went gladly with Van Ruysler to his farm. I had gathered, of course, from his talk, that he must be very well off. In Cape Town he spent his money freely, and I saw that he was a person of position and importance; but I was not prepared to find him practically a prince in his own country, owning estates so large that he had never been able to cover the ground even on horseback, and having great and lucrative interest in various mining concerns as well. The homestead (which was called Ruysfontein) I can hardly describe to you. An African farm place is so very different in every respect from one in Scotland that the picture of one does not help to realise the other. They were hundreds of miles from civilisation; but they had a beautiful house, furnished as well as any Belgravian mansion or Parisian hotel. Everything that taste could suggest and money could buy was there, and the ladies of the house were as refined and accomplished as it was possible to meet anywhere. Van Ruysler had a wife and an only daughter. Madame Van Ruysler was a Frenchwoman belonging to an old French family who had suffered considerable reverses in revolutionary times, and had finally emigrated to try and find a cure for their ills. During the few years she lived while I was at Ruysfontein she was more than a mother to me."

Fiona observed the softening of his eye and heard the tenderness in his voice, and knew that he deeply felt every word he spoke. She was so intensely interested in what he was saying that she had leaned forward in her chair and rested her elbow on its arm. Her eager eyes never for a moment left his face.

"And her daughter?" she said quickly. "Tell me about her."

"I am coming to that, Fiona," he answered. "Let me tell the story in my own way. I came as a guest to Ruysfontein, but weeks and months flew by and there never was any talk of my leaving. I seemed to settle down naturally in the place, and finally Van Ruysler asked me to remain permanently as his overseer and take his place in the superintendence of the estates. His interest in various great financial companies necessitated long and frequent absences from the farm, and he felt safer, he said, when I was there to take care of his wife and daughter. The first year I was at Ruysfontein, Fiona, I wrote eight letters to you. I have the dates in my pocket-book. None of them ever reached you?"

"No," she answered, "not one."

"And none of yours ever reached me. They were removed from the bag before they ever reached my hands or yours."

"By whom?" asked Fiona, with heightened colour. "It was a mean and wicked thing. Who dared to do it?"

"Van Ruysler's daughter. I am coming to the terrible part of my story, Fiona, and I don't know how I am to tell it. It was after they had been to Europe that everything seemed to come to a crisis. Madame Van Ruysler died on board the *Tantallon Castle* on

their homeward voyage, and it was soon after Van Ruysler's return alone with his daughter that he spoke to me about her ; but on the night of their return she told of her visit to the Glen and that she had seen you."

"Seen me !" cried Fiona with a start. "Where? We were very sorry, uncle and I, when we heard that they had been in the Glen that we had not had the chance of offering them the hospitality of Garrows and to hear about you. She must have made a mistake in thinking she saw me."

"No, I think she made no mistake. She described minutely the meeting of the dogcart just below the clachan. Anyhow, that was of no importance. She told me that you were going to be married immediately to Hamish Chisholme, of Ruglas, and that everybody had forgotten me in the Glen, and that those who had not forgotten had nothing to say but ill of the Ne'er-do-weel."

"She must have been a wicked girl," cried Fiona, with the red flush of indignation on her cheek. "Those were lies, Donald, wicked lies. You have never been forgotten, and none have ever spoken ill of you except Ruglas and some like him, and nobody would pay attention to what they say."

"Well, but you see, Fiona, I had no alternative but to believe what she said since I had no letters or anything to help me to think anything else."

"What did she mean by telling such wicked lies? Was she jealous, or what?"

"I suppose it was that," answered Donald with a natural reluctance, "but it was very sore on me, Fiona ; it seemed to take the heart clean out of me, and it made me feel, of course, that I never wanted to see Garrows Glen or anybody in it as long as I lived."

"Oh, Donald," cried Fiona, with a sob in her voice.

"To think you believed her against us all—and yet I don't wonder at it. No, I don't. You see, there were no letters or anything. Well, tell on."

"It was soon after that that Van Ruysler spoke to me about his daughter. It is a matter of which I find it very difficult to speak, and you will understand if I pass it over lightly. He feared that he would not live long, and the thought of leaving his only child in the world—her great wealth only making her a prey for adventurers—lay heavily on his soul. He was a great and splendid man, Fiona. I have never met any one like him. I loved him, I think, as I should have loved my father if he had lived and been worthy, and he felt just the same to me. That is one compensation for all—that I knew Van Ruysler and that he loved me. He said that it would give him peace even to die if he could leave Julie in my care. What could I do, Fiona? You were lost to me, married as I thought to Ruglas. No one remembered me in Glen Garrows, or ever wished to see my face. I was somebody at Ruysfontein, and could lift up my head among the best of them. Julie herself was a beautiful and exquisite creature whom any man might have loved, whom I might have loved if only memory had not stood between us. While the matter was still pending, and no decision had been made, we went on an expedition to the interior after some stolen cattle, and in a slight skirmish with the natives Van Ruysler received his death-wound. He had a lingering illness. However, before he died, and at his request, Julie and I were married at his bedside."

Fiona was now very white, and her hands gripped the arm of the chair as if she needed its support. Donald did not suffer his eyes to wander to her face, but kept them steadily fixed on the fire.

"We were married," he went on in the same quiet, even, somewhat desperate voice, "and the same afternoon he died. That is nearly two years ago. After his death we lived on as before at Ruysfontein. We were fairly happy—as happy, I suppose, as a man and woman could expect to be in a marriage undertaken as ours had been."

"But what of her?" asked Fiona in a whisper. "She must have cared for you."

"Very much. I would rather not speak of that, Fiona, it is an agony to remember or to think of it. You will understand it presently. We were fairly happy, as I said, for a year. I had plenty to do. The care of the great estates which were left entirely to my wife was enough to tax the energies of any man. About the end of the year I had occasion to make a journey to the coast on some urgent business matters, and when about fifty miles out from Ruysfontein I met the mail carrier, and from him got the last letter you wrote—indeed, the only one of yours I had ever received. I shall never forget, if I live to be a thousand years old, what I felt when I spread that letter out before me that night in the desert, and knew all that had happened and what I had done. I think I went mad for the time being, and instead of going on down to the coast, I rode right back to Ruysfontein and taxed her with what she had done, hoping, almost against hope, that she would be innocent—because it is a terrible thing for a man to feel that he has taken to his heart a woman capable of such black treachery as that—but she owned to it, and seemed to glory in it. I spoke hot words, of course, in my anger, as any man would, and we parted estranged. I had no intention of leaving her, only I felt that for the time being I could not endure to be near her or see her. I felt that I must have time to steady my thoughts

and to look ahead into the future, which appeared to me just then desolate indeed. I went down to the coast, wrote my answer to your letter at Durban, then came home. In these quiet days I had been able to face the thing, and I saw that there was no escape, and all that was left to me was to make the best of it; but one thing I had determined—that I would come home as soon as it was possible to arrange it and make my peace in Garrows and the Glen, for no man likes to be misjudged or blamed without a cause, Fiona, especially by those whom he loves as I loved every man, woman, or child from Garrows to Dalnaspidal. When I came home I found that my wife had gone away. She was a creature of impulses and moods, absolutely without any sense of responsibility or any steadiness of character. What did not please her she would cast aside. Those she did not like must not come within her sight. She came to the hasty conclusion that because I had spoken harshly to her in that moment of justifiable anger that I had cast her off for ever, and she took her own life.”

“Oh, no, no, no,” cried Fiona, almost wildly. “God forbid that such a terrible thing should have happened. Oh, Donald, I had not thought that you had gone through such deep waters as these.”

“It is true,” said Donald. “We had undeniable proofs. But I cannot dwell upon it all. It is still more than I can contemplate. She was a frail and faulty creature, but she had her sweet attributes and her generous impulses, and she loved me. God help her, that was her undoing. She loved me, all unworthy as I was, too well. You can understand,” he went on after a moment’s strained silence, “how this awful thought pursues me. I fear I was too harsh with her, who had been surrounded all her life with nothing but sweet



“‘IT IS A SAD, SAD STORY.’”

[Page 197.]

words and kind deeds. She was shielded from every wind that blew. Her every wish was anticipated. She had never been crossed or thwarted in her life. I feel that her death lies at my door. Not a pleasant thought with which to walk through life, Fiona. That is the story that has whitened my hair and made me an old man before my time. I have told it, because in your eyes at least I must be cleared. Will you believe now that my heart has never forgotten or grown cold to the Glen?"

For answer Fiona moved to his side quickly, and knelt by his chair, folding her hands on his knee.

"Oh, Donald, Donald!" she cried. "It is a sad, sad story, but I cannot mourn as I ought just at this moment, because my heart is so relieved."

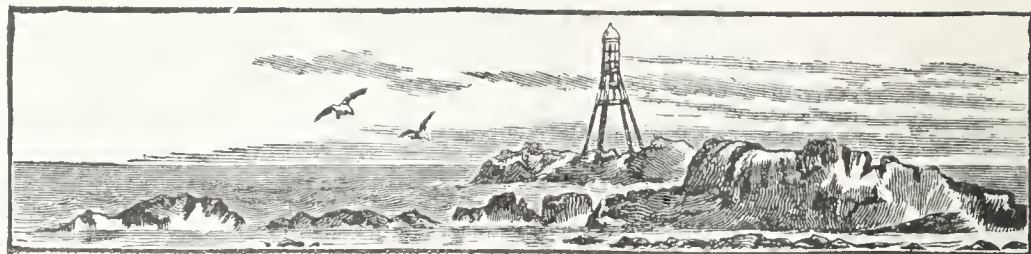
"Relieved of what?" he asked in wonder.

"Of the dread I had lest you had been unworthy," she said falteringly. "Forgive me that thought, Don; it is the only one that has ever wronged you."

"Then you don't think I was too much to blame, Fiona?" he asked, in a low, intense voice.

"You were not to blame at all, Don," she answered clearly. "You acted all through as our Donald would act, honourably and uprightly, as became a man."

"As became a man," cried Donald, springing to his feet. "These words have made a man indeed of me, Fiona. God bless you for them. You have lifted me from despair to sunshine again. God bless you for that, and for all you have done for me."



CHAPTER XXV.

IN QUIET WATERS.



RADUALLY the peace of the life in the Glen eased somewhat the strain on the heart of Donald Orde. It was surprising to himself to find how quickly he settled down into the old routine. It was the same yet not the same, for where in the old days he had felt himself to be an alien, and often a dependent, now he was not only treated as a welcome guest, but as the loved and honoured son of the house. From the first day of his coming, indeed, Maclean rolled the whole burden of the estate upon him, and spoke about him openly to factors and stewards as their future Laird. To this Donald scarcely demurred, although he did not believe that he would ever be Laird of Garrows; but it pleased the old man, and anything which pleased him, or made his failing days bright, was as duty in Donald's eyes. The tie between them was touching in the extreme. Often Fiona, watching the clinging dependence of the old man upon the young one, and Donald's respectful and untiring tenderness towards his uncle, felt her eyes wet with a rush of happy tears, for this was as it should be—the fulfilment of the

dream upon which she had lived during the long years of his exile. It was difficult for her to realise to the full the story which he had told her on the night of his home-coming. It was only when she saw him in a sad mood that she realised how much he had gone through. After that night they had never again recurred to the subject.

It seemed to Donald himself, and also to those looking on, that the one desire of his life, while he was at Garrows at least, was to feel and think and act as if he had never been away. He was accepted by the Glen and by all the countryside as the returned heir of Garrows, and though he often shook his head and told himself that it was a false position, and that he must one day protest and seek to put it right, he allowed the pleasant days and weeks, ay, and months to roll away, filling more and more ably and satisfactorily the duties of son and heir. He was astonished when at his uncle's desire he came to look into every detail of the estate and its management to find that it was much more valuable than he had at any time supposed, and also that his uncle was really a man of wealth.

So the pleasant spring and summer passed, and all were happy—yet with a kind of subdued and trembling happiness which seemed to indicate that they felt it to be unstable.

Jan Groot accommodated himself with surprising readiness to his changed life and surroundings, finding, as before, his chief happiness in being near his beloved master. Part of his devotion, however, was now given to Fiona. He was always at hand when she wished even the smallest attention, and she repaid him with that smile which made half the sunshine of Garrows Glen.

One evening in July, Roddie MacAlister, who had been at Perth for the day, came up the Glen in search of Donald. Roddie also had been entrusted with the story which had made the tragedy of Donald's exile, and after that long explanation the past was buried, and they tried to be and to feel as they had felt in the days of long ago. The onlooker sees most at all times, and Roddie, looking on at the quiet march of events in the old house of Garrows, had many an anxious hour on Fiona's account; but what he thought he never breathed to mortal, only waited on, hoping manfully that all would turn out for the best. His face wore rather an excited and interested look that night. He had just heard a piece of news in Perth which had excited him a good deal; so much so, indeed, that he could not rest until he had told it at Garrows.

He arrived to find Maclean alone; Donald and Fiona having gone for a stroll after dinner. He was not ill-pleased at the opportunity of a quiet talk with the old man, who on his part was pleased as usual to see him.

"I heard a bit of news in Perth to-day, Laird," he said as he sat down opposite Maclean, "a bit that has set me by the ears. There's to be a dissolution of Parliament, and the excitement of the general election will be on us before we know where we are."

"Time, too," growled Maclean, who took a keen interest in politics, and had long been dissatisfied with the action of the Government. "I wonder if there'll be a contest here."

"They don't expect so," answered Roddie. "But who do ye think is going to stand instead of Colonel Douglas?"

Maclean guessed several familiar names, but at the mention of each Roddie shook his head,

“Wrong again. What would you say to our friend Ruglas?”

“Ruglas!” echoed the old man, not seeking to hide his scorn. “A bonnie member of Parliament he’d make. Whoever told you would be making his fun of Hamish.”

“No, I heard it from good authority—no less a person than the Provost,” said Roddie, “and do you know that I’ve been thinking all the way up that the only man fit to represent the glens is Donald Orde!”

The old man’s thin face flushed, and he nervously clutched the arms of his chair.

“Faith you’re right, Roddie, and it would keep him in the country too. But do you think he’d stand?” He leaned forward in his eagerness, and fixed his eyes keenly on the young doctor’s face.

“Yes, I think he might, with a little pressure. I’m certain of this, that he would enjoy fighting Chisholme. But why do you look so doubtful? He hasn’t been saying anything lately, has he, that makes you think he wants to be off again?”

“No, but I’m never sure of it; and if he leaves Garrows again, Roddie, it’ll be the death of me.”

“There’s two things, Laird, which ought to be, and which I hope I’ll live to see come to pass,” said Roddie after a moment, “and that is to see Donald Orde member for the glens and Fiona his wife.”

Maclean clasped his thin hands and laughed shrilly.

“You’ve said it. You were aye a deil at guessing. Did you ever see two made for each other as they are?”

“Never,” said Roddie, honestly and fervently. “But when I hinted at it one night to Donald, he got into a terrible rage and told me he’d fell me if I ever spoke like that again: what I think he fears is that his wife

is not dead. Of course, that would be a dreadful business after he was married to Fiona."

"It would," said Maclean. "But how can there be any doubt? I don't think there could myself, do you?"

"Well, no, but queer things happen," said Roddie, with a sigh. "But I think we should put it into his head about the election. I believe he'd go in for it for the sheer pleasure of fighting Ruglas."

"He'd beat him, too," said the old man. "I could almost bet a hundred to one."

"He might; but Chisholme's own party would rally round him, Laird, and fight to the bitter end. Well, I must go. I wish I could wait till he comes in, but I'll be up the morn." So saying Roddie took himself off, and the old man sat still in his big arm chair weaving his bright dreams of the future, in which the two dearest to him on earth were the central figures. He was so full of it that when the two returned from their walk he spoke of it at once.

"Roddie has been here, Donald, and with what news think you? That there's to be a general election, and that Ruglas is to stand for the glens."

Donald nodded, and Fiona looked at once amused and scornful.

"Sir Hamish Chisholme, M. P.," she said with a proud curl of her upper lip. "Well, it would give him something to do."

"Roddie was in a desperate hurry to get away," said Donald. "Why didn't he wait and give us the news himself?"

"He had something else to do, I think; but he's coming to see you the morn, Donald; he's got a grand project in his head. What do you think it can be?"

"We are not good guessers," said Fiona coaxingly. "Come, now, tell us. Don't keep us in suspense."

"Well, he thinks, and I think too, that Donald might do worse than fight Ruglas. It fair excites me when I think of it."

Fiona's eyes sparkled, and she glanced with pride, which she made no effort to conceal, at the noble figure and fine face of Donald Orde. He was still her hero and her idol, and the close companionship of these blessed months, which even the bitterness of the past could scarcely shadow, had proved to her grateful and happy heart that he was still worthy, and more worthy than most, the absolute trust of a woman's heart. There had never been any talk of love between them, nor had anything occurred to mar even in the slightest degree the beautiful perfectness of their intercourse. They were simply friends, sufficient one to the other.

Donald smiled too, but at the same time shook his head.

"I must say I would enjoy fighting Ruglas tooth and nail, but it's not for me. I'm an ootlin'. The glens ought to have some one to represent them more worthy of them."

"There will not be two opinions about that," said Maclean grimly.

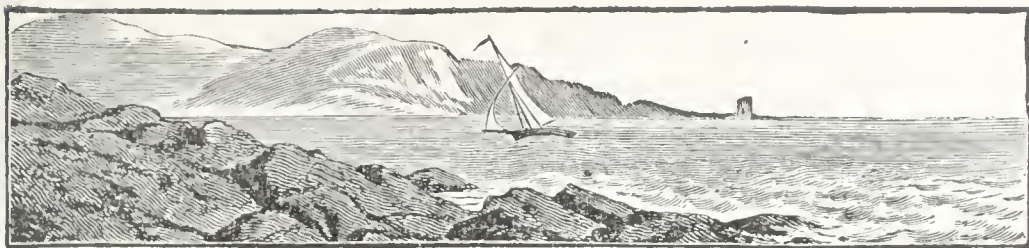
"Besides, I'm by no means settled down here, uncle," said Donald quietly. "You forget that I'm in reality only a visitor, although I must say I'm prolonging my visit beyond all conscience."

"If that is how you look at it," said Maclean grimly, 'the sooner you make yourself scarce the better, eh, Fiona?'

"Donald is only teasing us, uncle," said Fiona quickly. "He was only saying to me to-night as we

crossed the burn that this is his only home on earth, and if it is his home how can he possibly be a visitor in it? No, no, that argument will not hold water, as Roddie says. So own yourself at once in the wrong, like a man, Don."

"That is easy when you bid me," answered Donald, whereat the old man smiled a satisfied smile and turned his head away. For things were moving to his mind between these two, and it pleased him well.



CHAPTER XXVI.

MEMBER FOR THE GLENS.



FOR the next few weeks there was nothing talked of in the glens, through the whole length and breadth of Inverness-shire, but the coming election. In a month the fight began in earnest. Donald Orde used laughingly to say in after years that he did not know how he had allowed himself to be persuaded to stand ; but since his return to Garrows he felt himself much like a man who is drifting with the tide. It was sweet to let the golden and peaceful days slip one by one, enjoying them as they passed without recking their flight, without taking one thought for the future.

It was, perhaps, a natural reaction after the storm and stress of his life abroad. Nevertheless he knew as the day went by that each hour made it more difficult for him to leave, or even to talk of leaving. Again the chains of bondage were bound upon him ; but this time the chains were of gold. Being persuaded to stand for the glens, he threw himself into the struggle might and main on the Liberal side. Maclean was one of the few Highland lairds devoted to Liberalism, and it was no small joy to him to discover that Donald was heart and soul with him in his views. The young man's life

abroad had necessarily broadened his views and somewhat tinged him with the democratic spirit. He had but small patience with the narrower spirit which seeks to draw sharp dividing lines between class and class, and his public utterances left his hearers in no doubt of his attitude towards the great social, as well as political, questions of the day.

Roddie MacAlister was his faithful ally. Indeed, it was well it was summer time and that the health of the glens was consequently good, otherwise the young doctor's patients must have grumbled; for his whole time and attention seemed to be taken up with political meetings. The two enjoyed the fun as if they had been schoolboys, entering into it in their lighter moments with some of the gay spirit which had characterised their old school feuds. In spite of the political bias of the county, the bulk of private and social opinion was entirely on the side of Donald Orde. Hamish Chisholme was indeed no favourite. He had too much of the braggart and the bully in his composition, and even all the sweet smiles and cajoling ways of his lady-mother could not win for him a tithe of the enthusiasm which followed Donald everywhere throughout the contest. It was conducted with great good humour on both sides, although sometimes Hamish Chisholme, stung to the quick by the enthusiasm which followed his opponent everywhere, descended to some of the baser personal attacks which so often disgrace the annals of electioneering times.

The result of the contest from the beginning was almost a foregone conclusion. They were all excitement, and Maclean's joy over it was something beyond belief or description. It seemed to make a young man of him. He drove about with his young kinsman from

place to place encouraging him in every possible way, and taking such pride in him that often Fiona was touched almost to tears.

They were all in Inverness the night the result was announced. It was a triumphant victory for Donald, a majority larger than the county had ever returned any member with before. After the excitement and the speech-making at the hotel door were over, the little party gathered together in their sitting-room to exchange congratulations.

Fiona was a little pale and nervous with the excitement of the hour.

"I am so glad, Donald," she said to him, with a bright, sweet smile. "Now we know that there will be one man at least in the House who will support the legislation that makes for righteousness."

It was a remark full of significance and pregnant meaning. It sank into Donald's heart and gave him an insight into the mind of Fiona Forbes which seemed to shed new light upon her character. He saw in her not only the sweet and gentle girl whose joy it was to spread sunshine wherever she went, but the noble and thoughtful woman who took a serious and intelligent interest in the larger affairs of life.

"I pray that I may deserve what you say, Fiona," he answered, with great humility. "It will help me if I take these words as the Litany of my public life."

These words meant much, and Fiona's eyes filled as she turned quickly away. She liked to remember them in after days, for they were spoken in the first flush of a triumph which might well have carried him away, and they seemed to prove to her that he took the larger and more noble view of his position and responsibility as a public man.

Maclean's joy knew no bounds. They could not but smile as they watched his glee, boyish and unrestrained, over the defeat of Hamish Chisholme. When the door of the little sitting-room was closed upon them he turned to Donald and laid his hand affectionately on his shoulder, looking fixedly in his face.

"I'm proud of ye, lad. Prouder I couldna be unless ye were my ain son ; and I thank the Lord and Roddie MacAlister for keeping me alive to see this day."

Then Roddie gripped him by the hand, and it was a moment before Donald sufficiently recovered himself to speak. These were precious moments, and the fullness of joy and life seemed to oppress him, but at last some semblance of calmness came to them all, and they sat down to eat the meal which had been so long delayed, recounting between each mouthful some amusing and telling incident of the fray.

Maclean was very tired after the strain of the last few days was removed, and they were glad to get him to bed. Fiona retired almost immediately after, and the two friends were left to smoke a pipe together before separating for the night.

"Do you know what I am thinking?" said Donald, as he slowly filled his pipe. "I am bound to the place now and I can't get away even if I wanted."

"I don't suppose you do want," said Roddie philosophically. "At least if you do you don't deserve your good luck. You have reason to be a proud man this night, Don."

"I'm not, God knows I'm not. I've little enough to be proud of," said Donald quickly. "But I'm pleased for the old man's sake. Did you ever see such a revival? I believe he'll live for ten years yet, just to keep me up to the scratch."

Roddie laughed silently.

"It takes a lot to kill a Highland Laird, Don, I've proved that. You've certainly saved his life this time by your timely return, and the new interest you have created for him. I think Fiona is proud, too. Don't you?"

To this question Donald did not for the moment reply.

"Don't you think there is a fate in these things, Roddie?" he asked at length.

"What things?" asked Roddie, his innocent face wearing its most innocent look.

"Oh, you know well enough what I mean. When I came back I had no intention of remaining at Garrows permanently, and somehow I have been compelled to it in one way or the other. Don't you think there is a fate in that?"

"A Providence our women-folk would call it," said Roddie quietly.

"Well, Providence then. Do you think I might try and throw off the weight which oppresses me and enjoy what has come in my way to the full, Roddie?"

"Certainly. Why not? You speak continually as if you had done some wrong or wicked thing," said Roddie quickly. "I will tell you what I think if you like. There are few men that would have behaved as you did all through that unhappy business."

"Do you really think so?" asked Donald, with an intense eagerness which touched Roddie MacAlister to the quick.

"I do think so, and it is foolish and wrong, too, for you to dwell morbidly on what you couldn't possibly have helped or foreseen."

"I wish I could take that view, Roddie; it would make me a happier man," said Donald quickly.

"Oh, it will come in time," said Roddie lightly.

"Wait till you get to London and plunge into the vortex of political life—that'll soon drive all the morbid thoughts out of your head. I say, wasn't Ruglas mad to-night! Didn't you see the black scowl on his face as we passed him on our way to the hotel?"

"Yes, I did," said Donald, with slightly changing face. "Ruglas would do me an ill-turn if he could, Roddie. He bears me ill-will."

"He's not worth minding," said Roddie contemptuously, "and nobody heeds what he says."

"Still, a man's character can be taken away by constant dropping, and he has got some, I can see, to believe that I'm really a Ne'er-do-weel. But don't you think it's rather caddish to try and besmirch a man's private character?"

"Oh, it's beastly low down," said Roddie cheerfully, "and just for that very reason it defeats its own ends. You needn't care what he says about your life in the Colony so long as those whose opinions you value know all about it."

"No, that's true," said Donald. "I suppose I am over sensitive on the point, but as you say I may get over it. Well, I'm just going to stay here to have the first shot on the Twelfth, then I'm off, and I won't be back to England till Christmas, just in time for the reassembling of Parliament."

"Where are you going?" asked Roddie, open-mouthed.

"I'm going back to Natal."

"What for, in the name of all that's wonderful?" asked Roddie. "I should have thought you had had enough of the blessed place."

"So I have, but there's a good many things that want seeing to and winding up practically if I am to

make my permanent home here. I wish I knew what to do with those vast estates, Roddie. They hang round my neck like the nether millstone."

"Sell out," said Roddie cheerfully. "Turn it all into hard cash. You'll find that if you have a reputation as a South African millionaire it won't do you any harm in political life, but rather the reverse."

"I'll realise my own certainly, but the other—that's what bothers me. Sometimes I wake up in the night, Roddie," he said presently, and his voice changed, "and there is a nightmare on me which is horrible. Do you know the form it takes?"

Roddie shook his head.

"I think that my wife is still alive, that she is having an awful struggle somewhere, and cursing me for my share in her fate."

"It's the result of your morbid dwelling on one miserable theme. You must get rid of that or you will make a wreck of yourself. Goodness knows you're wreck enough for your years already. Why, I thought at the last meeting to-night you looked forty instead of five-and-twenty."

"That's nothing," said Donald indifferently. "A man's looks are of less account than anything else concerning him. Well, I have a double object in going out again. I want to see whether anything has been discovered."

"About your poor wife, you mean?" said Roddie.

Donald nodded.

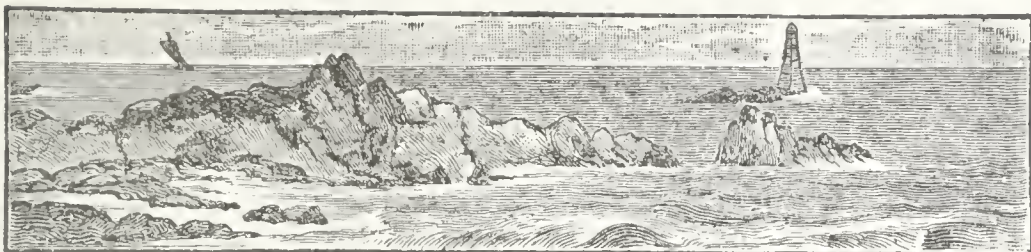
"And if nothing should ever be discovered, and you should one day be able to crush down this horrible nightmare which oppresses you," said Roddie, "what then?"

"Don't ask me," said Donald hoarsely. "What you

are thinking of is to me but a vision of Paradise, after which a man may strive all his life, but in vain."

"I'd like to go with you, Don," said Roddie, after a moment. "Would you take me?"

"Wouldn't I, and it shouldn't cost you a penny, lad," cried Donald, with a new light in his eyes. "That's the best inspiration you have had for many a day? I'll do my best to make it history."



CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DEAD PAST.



ON the fourteenth of August Donald Orde left the Glen, accompanied by his faithful Jân and Roddie MacAlister. He had persuaded the old doctor to give his son a well-earned holiday, and the two departed in high glee ; Roddie full of natural excitement and interest in the great journey he was about to make.

It was of the utmost importance to Donald to have the companionship of his old friend on his necessarily somewhat sad and trying journey. To have returned alone to the scene of the great trouble of his life would have been a trial of no ordinary kind ; but with Roddie by his side he felt himself strong to face and to bear anything.

Their voyage was pleasant and uneventful, and on their arrival at the railway terminus, a few miles from Durban, the bullock waggon from Ruysfontein was awaiting them all in the old familiar way. Donald indeed found it difficult to believe that he had been so far and gone through so much since he left the waggon at the wayside station eight months before. But there was no mistaking the hearty welcome on the face of

Wilhelm, the Boer driver, and also of Michael, the English groom, who had taken it upon himself to come down to the station to welcome his master home.

They arrived in the country at a somewhat unseasonable time. The rains had begun, and the scenery suffered in consequence through lack of the brilliant sunshine to warm it. However, they had the greenness of the veldt to atone for the lack of warmth, and Roddie was filled with interest and admiration for everything he saw. When they arrived at Ruysfontein his astonishment knew no bounds. Although Donald had frequently told him that it was a comfortable and even luxurious home, he was not prepared for such elegance and magnificence. It indeed presented a great contrast to the great bare home he had left.

"By Jove! Donald," he said, as they sat at their dainty, appetising dinner in the well-appointed dining-room, "I had no idea it was anything like this. You know what a fellow thinks about foreign countries as a rule. He is in a state of heathen darkness, and is apt to regard them as inferior in every way to his own country."

"I told you it was a nice place, didn't I?" said Donald; but his air was pre-occupied and his face was shadowed. Roddie saw that memory sat grimly by his side, and that he could not shake off the depressing associations of the place. He felt glad that he had come with him. The Highland strain in Donald Orde's nature rendered him peculiarly a prey to melancholy, and Roddie could easily imagine him sitting in this lonely and deserted house almost in the depths of despair. But he would not allow him to be dull, nor would he leave him a moment to the solitude of his own thoughts. He kept plying him with questions innumerable. There seemed nothing too trivial or obscure to

escape Roddie's attention. Thus Donald found the first evening pass less miserably than he had anticipated.

"I would like you to come upstairs and see the rooms there, Roddie," he said, after dinner. In reality he felt the sooner he went through the whole ordeal the better, and it would be easier with Roddie by his side. So they ascended the wide, richly carpeted staircase, and entered the boudoir where poor Julie had spent so much of her time. It was just as she had left it. Roddie observed him pale slightly and clutch the blue satin hangings at the window as if a wave of memory smote him with unbearable keenness.

"All right, old chap," he said soothingly. "I know it's a bit rough on you. By Jove, it's a beautiful place, and no mistake; everything up to the mark! I can't think how you have endured the plain living in the Glen after all this."

"Hush, man, you don't know what you are talking about," answered Donald quickly. "What am I to do with all this, Roddie, unless I sell the place? I should like to sell out, because I shall never take any pleasure in it again, and yet I feel somehow that I dare not. What would you advise me to do?"

Roddie shook his head.

"I should need to think it over, Don; but I shouldn't be in a hurry selling it if I were you. Couldn't you get a married overseer to live in the house? You never know what may turn up, and you might want to come back some day."

"The chances are against it," answered Donald. "But I'll see if I can't get an English or Scotch fellow and his wife to take up residence here. It would be a God-send to many if I only knew where to lay hands on them. I shouldn't like the place touched. I believe I have a

kind of superstitious feeling about it ; but there it is." He gave his shoulders a little shrug and looked mournfully round the dainty nest from which the bird had flown.

"Now come outside so that you can see everything, Roddie, so that you will be able to follow me step by step through all these years. Yon is the spot the battle was fought the night I got Fiona's letter." He pointed from the window to the little kopje behind the house where so many momentous episodes of the past eight years had taken place. "To-morrow, if it is fair, we will ride out to Lake Lokani, and perhaps we might go on to Doort's place, the outpost station from which we started on the expedition which cost poor Van Ruysler his life. The place is haunted for me, Roddie, every stick and stone of it, and yet I take a kind of melancholy pleasure in seeing it again. If you hadn't been with me, old chap, it would have been too much for me."

"Didn't I know that?" assented Roddie quickly, "and isn't that the only ground upon which my old dad spared me for so long? I'm glad I came, Don; I seem to understand everything better now, and I do feel for you."

Next day the rain had ceased, and being pursued by a strange restlessness, which would scarcely permit him a moment's stillness, Donald started with his friend, and the faithful Jan in attendance as usual, on their long ride to Lake Lokani, and thence through the bush to Doort's station.

"I don't like the look of this place, Donald," said Roddie, as they emerged from the shadow of the trees upon the little open space on the bank of the great white lake. "Ugh, it gives me the creeps!"

Although no rain was falling, the sky was dull and cheerless. Not a ray of sunshine penetrated the heavy

atmosphere. A shower of drops fell from every branch they touched, and a dank, heavy odour seemed to rise from the teeming undergrowth.

"It's a horrible place, isn't it, Roddie?" said Donald, looking with strangely fascinated eyes upon the still, soundless depths of the great lake. "And you don't wonder, do you, that I'm haunted by it and by the memory of the thing which happened here? Here we found her scarf and her pony's broken bridle! My God, Roddie, it is more than I can bear!" He covered his face with his hands, and Roddie felt himself powerless to offer any comfort in such hopeless anguish.

He persuaded him at length to leave the haunted place, but they rode long in silence after they had quitted its shores, and a load seemed to lie on the heart of each, affecting even their speech.

Donald found that all the affairs of the estate had gone on favourably in his absence. Van Ruysler had trained his dependents well, and, having bound them to his service by the ties of a personal devotion, had never feared any lapse of duty in his absence. They had served Donald no less faithfully, and he did not stint them of his praise, and rewarded them as well with a substantial token of his satisfaction.

After they had made a close and thorough inspection of all the various departments of the estate, there really remained little for them to do. His short absence had shown Donald that he was not essential to the place. His work there indeed appeared to be done, and he could well leave it to the care of others without much anxiety or concern. There was a good deal of disappointment, both expressed and silent, when it became known that he was only paying a flying visit and that he intended going back to England; but before he left,

however, he was fortunate in securing the services of a young fellow who had come out to learn ostrich farming in the karoo, and who having married his instructor's daughter was anxiously looking for a berth which would enable him to make a suitable home for her. Donald heard of him accidentally at Durban, and lost no time in making inquiry concerning him, with the result that, before they sailed, the new manager with his wife was installed at Ruysfontein.

Donald had pleaded with Jan Groot to remain in his own country, but the faithful fellow had received his urging with such dejection that he could not press the matter. Jan belonged to the type which attaches itself to persons rather than to places, and though he was undoubtedly more at home on the African farm than in the Highland Glen, his love for his master was his first and dearest consideration.

"What am I to do with Jan, Roddie?" asked Donald, in perplexity, the night before they left Ruysfontein. "How do you think he will enjoy brushing my coat and keeping my rooms straight in Piccadilly? That's what he's after; but I sha'n't have work for him, and I'm sure he'll be as homesick—well, as I was the first six months I spent here."

"Well, you'll need to make a trial of it," said Roddie. "But what a swell you're going to be, Don. Setting up in Piccadilly with a valet and all! A Highland tyke like Roddie MacAlister will hardly dare look at you."

"Say that again, Roddie, and I'll punch your head," was the prompt rejoinder. "But, I say, isn't it strange how a fellow's destiny seems to environ him? If I was asked what I should like best to be, I would say a farmer or a shepherd in Glen Garrows, and here am I, a South African speculator, I was about to say, but it's

hardly that, and now I'm to be a Member of Parliament shut up three-quarters of the year in London, which is the place of all on earth I hate the most."

"You won't always feel like that," said Roddie shrewdly. "Well, are you going to bed? Mind, we've to be early on the move to-morrow, and we don't want to be landed half-dead on the steamer. It's poor preparation that for a voyage which is trying enough to most folks."

In spite of this sage advice Roddie did not at once turn in. Left to himself he lit another pipe and stepped through the French window into the garden, upon which the night dew lay heavily, filling the air with many strange odours. He took a stroll around the house, glancing now and again towards the clustering roofs of the Kaffir village, then away across to the rolling solitudes of the veldt. He had enjoyed his visit and its novel experiences, but a sense of great relief filled him at the thought that to-morrow he would turn his face homeward.

"For there's something about this place," he said to himself again, "a something which gives a fellow the creeps. It's not canny, and I shall be glad to see the last of it."

He plucked a dark and glossy leaf from a prickly pear tree as he spoke, and placed it between the leaves of his pocket-book.

"It will, maybe, bring me luck," he said to himself with a queer smile. "Anyhow I'll show it to Fiona, and try and tell her what a weird kind of spell the place exercised over me. I'm glad she isn't here."



CHAPTER XXVIII.

FELLOW-PASSENGERS.

“**B**Y Jove, Roddie,” said Donald, in a surprised voice, “there’s Leyden and his wife and daughter, too. I believe I’m going to know a lot of our fellow-passengers, which is not an unmixed blessing.”

“And who, may I make so bold as to inquire, who is Leyden?” asked Roddie, with a contented puff at his cigarette. They were leaning over the rail of the *Dunvegan Castle* as she was getting up steam to sail out of Cape Town harbour. Roddie’s face wore a look of most absolute content; he had had enough of South Africa. Although he had enjoyed his brief sojourn he was glad at the thought of going home.

It was now the second week of November, and they hoped still to be in time to spend Christmas in the Glen.

“Never heard of Leyden?” said Donald, slightly elevating his eyebrows. “Why, he’s one of our best known Cape millionaires. He’s a power in the Transvaal. I did hear that he was coming home to spend a year or two in England, and it seems to be true.”

Roddie looked with interest at the gentleman about whom these particulars were uttered. He was a short,

squat man, with a strong, clever face, the heavy jaw indicating great decision of character, and the piercing black eyes a power of seeing into the heart of things. The lady who walked by his side presented a striking contrast to him. She was young and extremely handsome, with an aristocratic and regal style of beauty which seemed to mark a great gulf between their origins.

"She's never the mother of that great girl," said Roddie, with interest.

"Oh no. She's his second wife—an American from Washington, belongs to one of the old New England families, I believe, which are as exclusive in their way as the flower of our aristocracy. Everybody was surprised when Leyden returned from the States with her. He has a lot of children by his first wife, and he is not particularly attractive, as you can see, but not a bad fellow at the bottom. And then, of course, there was the 'almighty dollar.'"

"She's a glorious creature, certainly," said Roddie, with enthusiasm. "But I should think it was rather rough on the other kids. I must say the daughter looks rather an uninteresting individual."

"Not so uninteresting as you think," answered Donald significantly. "She's inherited a lot of her father's ability. He's one of the ablest men in financial matters they have got in the Transvaal. He simply never makes a miss in his speculations. Of course he is enormously wealthy."

"Do you know him well?" asked Roddie.

"Van Ruysler knew them intimately," said Donald, "and I've stayed at their house, but they never visited at Ruysfontein, nor did the women folk ever meet."

"Hullo!" said the man of whom they were speaking, suddenly catching sight of Donald's face and coming

forward with a cordial smile and outstretched hand. "Are you going home now?"

"Yes, Mr. Leyden. Let me introduce my friend. Dr. MacAlister—Mrs. Leyden."

"We are sure of at least one, shall I say two, pleasant companions," said the millionaire's wife, with a bewildering smile. "I was only saying to Leon as we came on board that we shouldn't have a decent fellow-passenger at this season of the year. How do you happen to be going to England now?"

"Well, as it happens, this time I've no choice," answered Donald. "I don't suppose you have heard, Mr. Leyden, that I have been returned as member for my own county."

"No," cried Leyden, with the greatest astonishment, at the same time slapping his knee with unaffected delight. "When did all this happen?"

"At the election last summer, and I made a hurried run out with my friend here to make sure that everything was going on right and to wind up affairs a little."

"So you have gone back on the Colony," said Leyden, with a steadfast, keen look at him. "Well, I don't wonder at it. Given certain conditions I couldn't imagine a more delightful life than that of an English politician."

"Nor I," said Mrs. Leyden, with a slight tinge of regret in her tone. "Then you will be in London all the Parliamentary season, Mr. Orde, and we shall see something of you."

"If you are also to be there, Mrs. Leyden, I shall hope to have the pleasure," said Donald; and Roddie standing a little in the background noted in Donald's manner a polished courtesy which somehow seemed to raise a little gulf between them. For he was only plain

Roddie MacAlister from the Glen of Garrows, a country doctor, who knew little of the great world or of the courtesy due to its ladies. It made him feel that Donald was years older in the knowledge of the world and of his fellow-creatures.

"We have taken a house in Park lane on a three years' lease," said Mrs. Leyden. "It was very much recommended to us, and it is large enough to hold us all, although three of the children are going to school immediately after Christmas."

"Are they all here?" asked Donald, with interest.

"Yes, they came on earlier, and are down inspecting their cabins, I suppose, with their governess. We had better go, Leon, and see that ours are all right. *Au revoir*, we shall meet later on; I hope we sha'n't have a stormy voyage."

"Isn't it odd, Roddie," said Donald, after their friends had moved away, "isn't it odd how they all gravitate to London? No matter what influence or position a man may have in the Colony, as soon as he gets enough means either he or his wife begins to yearn after English life and English society."

"Why, of course," said Roddie complacently. "That's easy enough to understand. There's no other country in the world a patch on our own. To use a rather vulgar expression, it's better to be at the cadger's tail here than the King of the Cannibal Islands."

Donald smiled at the apt allusion.

"That's just it; but I think we'll be able to predict a social success for Mrs. Leon Leyden. Don't you think she accepts these children with a remarkable degree of complacency? I hear she is very fond of the eldest daughter, who in her turn repays her with the greatest devotion."

"There is certainly something very special about the American women of the higher type," said Roddie thoughtfully. "We shall soon lose sight of you, Donald; you will be swallowed up in the vortex of London society, hob-nobbing with millionaires and duchesses. The poor old Glen will be nowhere."

"I'll pitch you into the sea presently, Roddie," said Donald, in lazy indignation. "'Let's go down and see if our cabin's all right, and try and find out how many passengers we have.'"

The boat was full, and Donald was surprised to find on board a goodly number of his colonial acquaintances, people to whom he had been introduced from time to time either at Ruysfontein or by Van Ruysler on the various journeys they had taken together when he was alive. This, as he expressed it, was not an unmixed blessing. It seemed to keep vividly before him the whole circumstances of his life in the Colony. The fact of poor Julie Van Ruysler's disappearance—which had excited for a short space of time the imagination and speculation of all who had known her or her father in the remotest degree—was naturally recalled to their thoughts by the sight of her husband; and Donald felt uncomfortably that he was an object of considerable interest and speculation. No one, of course, ever alluded in the remotest degree to her sad fate, and yet so strong a hold did his morbid imagination take of Donald that he shunned the company of his fellow-passengers and spent a good deal of his time below, or in a remote portion of the vessel to which no one came.

Roddie MacAlister was not allowed to have an idle voyage. When they had been two days out of port the ship's surgeon, who had been ill when he came on board, was laid up with a very severe attack of pneu-

monia, and as many of the passengers were very ill, Roddie's services were much in request. But he enjoyed the work, and became a general favourite by reason of his happy face and bright, cheerful manner.

Among the passengers who were really seriously ill was the governess who was travelling with the Leydens in charge of the younger children. She never appeared on deck indeed from the first day she came on board, and it was several days before she would allow the doctor to enter her cabin. But when Mrs. Leyden herself was able to come out of her own state-room and saw how very ill the governess was she promptly went in search of Dr. MacAlister, whom she found pacing the deck in the rain arm-in-arm with his friend.

Both came forward quickly to speak to her, as they had not seen her since the first evening at dinner.

"I hope you are better?" said Donald, at the same time offering his arm as the vessel gave a sudden lurch.

"Oh yes, thank you, I'm getting on," she said brightly. "But we are not having a very enjoyable kind of voyage, are we? I never remember it so stormy. I'm usually only downstairs for twenty-four hours or so, and I believe this is the fifth day, is it not? One rather loses count of time shut up in the lower regions."

"Did you hear that the doctor was laid up?" asked Donald.

"Yes, my maid has just told me. I never have the doctor. Barker has been with me so long she knows exactly how to treat me for *mal-de-mer* and most other things. I hear that you are kindly acting for him," she said, turning to Roddie. "I wish you would go down and see my governess. She is really very ill, and an obstinate creature as well. She absolutely forbade me

to send the doctor, and said she would refuse to see him. But, of course, that's all nonsense."

"I don't think we've seen her on deck?" said Donald, with interest.

"She has been with us only a few months, but we like her very much. In fact, the children simply adore her. She was very anxious to come to England, and we were equally anxious, of course, to have her."

"Is she young?" inquired Roddie.

"Oh, quite young; not more than three or four and twenty I should say, and is highly accomplished. In fact, I can't quite make her out. It is evident that she has been brought up in quite an exceptional way. She has told us very little about herself. She is an orphan, and, being very poorly left at her father's death, has been obliged to seek her own living. I believe she has some relatives in England, hence her anxiety to get there."

"Shall I go down and see her?" asked Roddie.

"If you will. Shall I go with you?"

"No, I think I would recommend you to a sharp constitutional round the deck. Would you like me to send Mr. Leyden up? I saw him in the smoking-room about ten minutes ago. He doesn't know you are on deck."

"Never mind, thank you. I daresay Mr. Orde will take care of me, and I want to hear a good deal from him about London life."

She laid her hand on the arm Donald offered again, and with a nod to Roddie they walked off.

Roddie went downstairs, and under the steward's direction found the cabin where the governess was lying ill. It was one of the larger state-rooms, which she shared with her two girl pupils. They, however, suffered nothing from sea-sickness, and only came down to sleep

or to inquire at odd times how she was. He knocked lightly at the door and then walked in, at the same time turning on the electric light so that its full glare shone on the berth where the poor girl lay prostrate.

She looked round with a sudden, sharp gesture, which seemed to have something of terror in it, and her pale face flushed in deep displeasure.

"Who are you?" she asked, with a rudeness strangely out of keeping with the sweetness of her voice and the exquisite beauty of her face.

"Only the doctor, Miss Marx," he answered cheerily. "I am sent here by Mrs. Leyden, who is much concerned about you, and I hope you will let me see whether I can do something for you. It's rather slow for you lying here, is it not? and wouldn't you be grateful even to me if I could get you on your feet?"

"I'm not particularly anxious to get on my feet," she answered petulantly. "All I want is to be let alone. Sea voyages are always disagreeable, and the time passes as quickly in bed as anywhere else."

"But do you know that if you lie there until we get to Tilbury you will be as weak as a kitten, and perhaps be obliged to lay up at Christmas in London? You wouldn't like that, would you?"

"I don't think I should mind it much," she answered listlessly. "Anyhow, I'm too ill to get up now."



CHAPTER XXIX.

HOMeward BOUND.



HERE did not appear to Dr. MacAlister to be much the matter with Miss Marx except a general listlessness and absence of desire to exert herself in the slightest degree. He was very much attracted by her appearance, but at the same time he thought it was his duty to Mrs. Leyden to find out whether her governess were shamming in order to escape her duties on the voyage. There was a very mournful sweetness in the large, dark eyes, which appealed strongly to Roddie's rather susceptible feelings, but he crushed it down manfully, and donned his severest professional air.

"Now, Miss Marx," he said, "I don't find that there is very much the matter with you. You are not sea-sick, and your pulse and temperature are normal. Will you tell me why you prefer lying here in this stuffy box to getting on deck for a blow of the ocean air?"

"I'm too ill to go upstairs," she said, in a low voice; but she did not meet his penetrating, searching gaze. "I was ill when I came on board. I am always very ill on board ship."

"You have sailed a good deal, then?" observed Roddie cautiously.

"Not very much. I have made several short voyages in the Colony, and have once sailed to Europe and back, that is all."

"Well, I'm taking Dr. Donovan's place, and I am confident that if he had been here he would order you on deck at once. I would like you to get up now, take a sharp walk on deck and appear at dinner; then you would be quite yourself."

"You are not the ship's doctor, then?" she said, raising herself on her elbow and looking at him with interest.

"No, poor Donovan is laid up. He is seriously ill, if you like, and would give a good many dollars to get about, Miss Marx."

"Are you one of the passengers, then?" she asked.

"Yes. My name is MacAlister, at your service."

"MacAlister," she said, uttering the harsh Highland name with a broken sweetness which sounded irresistible in Roddie's ears. "Surely that is very Scotch?"

"Yes, I flatter myself that there can be no uncertainty about my nationality," said Roddie complacently. "I've just had a little trip to the Colony at a friend's expense. Are you an Afrikander, Miss Marx?"

"Yes," she answered; and though he waited a moment she did not seem disposed to give him any further particulars.

"It's a big country, isn't it? But you might chance to know the part I have been visiting. A place called Ruysfontein, on the borders of the Orange Free State."

She clutched the pillow with her hand, and managed to hide her face, though without exciting his remark.

"I don't know much about those remote parts," she said, the words coming from between her dry lips mechanically. "I've never had the opportunity of

travelling much. But you didn't choose a very nice season of the year for your trip. Most English people come out in spring."

"Well, as it happened, I had no choice. The friend who is with me had to come. The place is his, but he has got rather sick of it, and is not likely to make his home there again. It was the scene of a great trouble in his life, and, of course, that makes a man feel different to a place. Don't you think associations are everything?"

He was leaning up against the doorway giving these half confidences carelessly. He was not betraying his friend in any way, since the whole circumstances of Donald Orde's life at Ruysfontein were the talk of the Afrikanders on board.

"Yes, associations are everything," she managed to answer, and with her dainty lace handkerchief wiped the cold drops from her brow brought there by the awful strain of the moment.

"Nice sort of people these are you are with," Roddie said presently. "Mrs. Leyden is a very charming woman."

"She is ; and she is as charming at home to those who are dependents on her as she is to the world outside, and there are few like that," answered the governess with great fervour, partly brought by her relief that the subject was changed.

"She is rather worried about you, and I think if you feel like that to her you ought to make an effort to get up. It would please her very much to see you on deck, I am sure."

She raised herself slightly again and looked at Roddie's broad, honest face, as if trying to gauge how far he might be trusted.

"Dr. MacAlister, will you believe me that I am not pretending? I am really too ill to get up, and I wish you would only leave me alone till we get on shore. It is not as if the children required me—they have plenty of maids to attend them—and I know that directly I go on deck I shall be worse."

Roddie looked mystified; his professional skill inclined him to believe that she was shamming. And yet she looked at him so straightly, and with such innocence in her large, mournful eyes, that he felt half inclined to accept her statements regarding her health.

"I can only advise you, of course," he said politely. "It is no use insisting; but I certainly think that you might give my advice a trial, and you may take my word for it that you'll be a poor wreck if you lie here for another fortnight."

"Well, I'll see in a day or two. Perhaps I shall get up," she answered. "But I should like you to come and see me if you don't mind the trouble."

"I shall be charmed," answered Roddie readily. "But if you refuse to do what I tell you I need not bother to come and see you professionally."

She smiled slightly, and the radiance of that smile made her face the loveliest Roddie MacAlister had ever seen.

"Well, I need not stay any longer now. I'm an awful hypocrite, I know, but I shall say to Mrs. Leyden that you had better remain below for a day or two."

"I shall be very grateful to you; and if you can come and see me again I shall be still more grateful. But of course you will be very much occupied if you are acting for the ship's surgeon. Then your friend will claim your leisure moments. He is on board with you, I suppose?"

"Why, yes, he is a great friend of Mr. Leyden. It is possible you may have met him at their house. He says he has visited them. His name is Donald Orde."

"No, I have never met him there. You see I have only been with them a little time. Well, you do like him?"

"He's out and out the best fellow in the world; and he will be a great man yet. He has just been returned as member for his own county. If you live long in London with the Leydens you may be sure you will hear a good deal about him."

Thus did the guileless Roddie deliver himself out of the fulness of his heart concerning his friend, little knowing with what awful and intolerable pain his words stabbed the heart of the woman in the berth before him. When he bade her "good-afternoon" and slipped out of the cabin, she buried her face deep in the pillows, and it was as if the anguish and hopelessness of death smote her. Had he come back an hour later he would have found in her excited and feverish state some justification for her own plea that she was unable to leave her berth.

He went straightway up to the deck and sought out Donald—who had already been deserted by Mrs. Leyden.

"Has she gone under already?" asked Roddie, astonished to find him alone.

"Yes, we were pitching a good deal, and it was more than she could stand. Well, how did you find the patient?"

"Upon my word, Donald, I don't know what to say about her. One minute I thought she was shamming, and the next that she was really as ill as she said. I wish you could see her—she's a lovely creature."

"Yes," said Donald with but a languid interest. "Perhaps you'll meet your fate on board the *Dunvegan Castle*."

"It isn't likely," said Roddie grimly. "Besides, that sort of fate wouldn't suit a quiet country doctor like me. It's quite evident, anyhow, that she doesn't want to come on deck, and, what's more, I don't believe she will. And yet she speaks with the greatest respect and esteem of Mrs. Leyden, it is evident there is no screw loose there."

"Perhaps she is really ill. You are accustomed to the iron constitutions of the women in the glens, Roddie, and you don't know the delicate creatures English and colonial women are. They make a lot of fuss over themselves. I suppose you told her she was a humbug? I think I see it in your face."

"Well, not exactly, though I did tell her there was nothing the matter with her, and unless she did what I told her there was no use in my paying her any more professional visits."

At this Donald laughed long and silently.

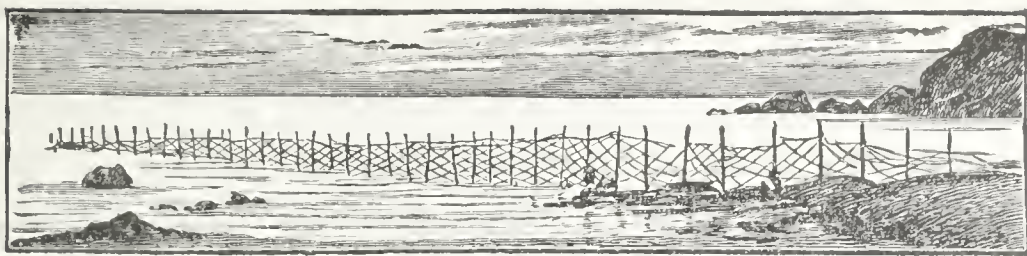
"Oh, Roddie, Roddie MacAlister, if I had any vision of seeing you set up in a West End practice in London, so that I would still have my chum to fall back on, you have knocked that little scheme on the head. You'll have to learn to humbug yourself and other people a lot before that day comes."

"It never will come, then," said Roddie bluntly, "for if I think there's nothing the matter with people it would be the end of me if I couldn't tell them so. If they don't like it they must just do the other thing. But I'll say what I think."

During the next fortnight Roddie MacAlister saw a good deal of the governess in the cabin below, but he

could not persuade her to get up, nor did he urge her very much after the first few days, for it was quite evident that she was very weak and prostrate, having indeed fretted herself into a low fever which baffled all Roddie's skill to thwart.

During the voyage they became very intimate with the Leydens, and were a very happy little party, and at Tilbury parted with regret, but with many promises of future meetings. Donald Orde and Roddie, having few belongings to trouble about, were among the earliest to leave the steamer. As they ran up the companion-way for the last time a white, anguished face appeared round one of the cabin doors and waited until they disappeared. Donald Orde felt his heart leap as he set foot again on British soil. He had left the old life behind, he hoped for ever, and the only vision before his eyes was of the face of Fiona ; the only thought troubling him, whether he would read in her dear eyes the welcome for which he longed.



CHAPTER XXX.

AT LAST.



THE period of Donald's absence had not been irksome to Fiona left alone in Garrows with her uncle. Now that all misunderstanding was cleared up she could afford to await the development of events. What they might involve did not trouble her at all. Her heart, relieved of its burden of hope deferred, seemed stayed in ineffable content. The Glen long remembered that autumn and the sunshine which Fiona seemed to shed wherever she went. The old Laird, too, seemed to have acquired a new lease of life. It seemed indeed as if all the shadows had rolled away from the old house of Garrows, never to fall again. Letters came from the travellers by every mail. Those which came to Garrows had to be taken down for reading at the Brig of Sloy and *vice versâ*. So the time passed pleasantly and quickly away until the day came when the wanderers were expected home. A telegram came from London the moment the *Dunvegan Castle* cast anchor in the Thames; twenty-four hours later the carriage from Garrows met the afternoon train at Dalnaspidal and brought them home.

It was Christmas Eve: the close of a fine, dry,

bracing day, the sky clear as amber and a slight frost—sufficient to make the roads firm and to keep white on every hillside and tree the sprinkling of snow which had fallen in the night.

“There’s no place like home, Don,” said Roddie, as they entered the mouth of the Glen and saw it all before them stretching from the Brig of Sloy to the head of the loch, with Craighban standing stately and white-capped and solemn behind the old house of Garrows.

“That’s where you’re right, old chap,” Donald answered, and both their hearts were so full that no further speech seemed possible to them at the moment.

Presently they came to Sloy Brig, where all the inmates of the white house were waving to them, rejoicing over their return. But when the noisy welcome was over Donald was glad to drive quietly on alone, his heart beating with excitement, which was half fear at the prospect of the welcome which might await him. The whole clachan turned out as the carriage came round the head of the loch, and then there was another pause to shake hands with old and young, and to listen to the many warm words of welcome which sprang spontaneously from the kind hearts of those who had known and loved Donald Orde all his days.

These things made his heart very soft and tender, and all that was best in him was uppermost as he uttered his faltering words of thanks and then drove on rapidly to the house.

The door was thrown open as he drove up, but Maclean stood on the steps alone, and a quick disappointment leaped to Donald’s eyes as he sprang from his seat and clasped the old man’s hands.

“Well, you see, here I am, safe and sound, uncle,” he cried cheerily, touched to the quick by the old man’s

evident emotion. "It is grand to come home ; but where's Fiona ?"

"She has gone out for a bit walk," answered Maclean, with a little twinkle in his eye. "I said it would maybe do her good. Of course we have been excited all day at the prospect of your coming."

"But why did she wait all day and then go out just when I was at the very door ?" asked Donald with a slight touch of petulance.

Maclean shook his head.

"Queer are the ways of women, Donald ; but I can tell you where she went if you like, and after I have had a look at you you can go and fetch her back."

"All right," said Donald, and his face cleared. The prospect of a word alone with Fiona, away from every eye and ear, pleased him well.

"Ye are looking not that ill," said Maclean, holding him by the arm in the hall, and looking him over from top to toe. "I suppose you have left Roddie at his father's house, and fell glad they would be to see him ?"

"Yes, the whole house was turned out on Sloy Brig. You are looking well yourself. You have never ailed anything since we went away ?"

"No," answered Maclean. "Why should I ail anything ?" he asked loftily and as if he had never had an ailment in his life. "I hope that this will be the end of your wanderings, lad, and that you will settle down content, and find enough excitement in your Parliamentary duties."

"Oh, that's all right," said Donald with a laugh. "Well then, uncle, if you tell me which way Fiona has gone I may as well go and meet her before I take off my coat."

"Oh, she will not be that far. She only went by

the bridle path to the stile at the deer forest. You ken the place, Donald?"

"Ay, well," answered Donald. "I won't stop, uncle, but bring her back as fast as I can."

"All right, we'll see, we'll see," said Maclean; and there was a certain significance in his eye which it was impossible Donald could not notice, but he made no sign.

His heart beat and his foot was light as he trod the familiar bridle path which led from the back of the house up the bare hillside to the stile which gave entrance to the lower end of the great deer forest of Craighban. The immense thickness of the trees, chiefly birch and pine, made a clear dividing line along the lower slope of Craighban, thus creating one of those sharp contrasts of light and shade which make the rich variety of Highland scenery.

He saw Fiona when he was some little distance off, and she also saw him, but she stood still at the stile, not seeking to come to meet him.

The sun had now set and the quick December twilight was closing rapidly over the earth, yet there was in the air that peculiar and delicate clearness which renders objects at a distance visible even when the light is fading; so Donald could see Fiona's face quite distinctly, and was not disappointed because the joy of welcoming gladness was written upon it.

She held out her hands to him with a quick gesture when he drew near, and he clasped them both, and then suddenly pressed them to his lips.

"I was disappointed just at the moment that I did not see you at the door, Fiona," he said, "but it is better, far better to see you here."

"How well you look," she answered, with a slight,

tremulous smile, "and how pleasant it is to see you again! Are you glad to come back?"

"How glad, Fiona, God only knows. I can never tell you," he answered, in low, full tones, which betrayed the deep, inward emotion of his heart.

"How do you think uncle is looking? He has been in splendid health all the time you have been away, and such spirits—just like a boy let loose. We have not had such happy days in Garrows within my memory."

"I hope they are but the beginning of many, Fiona," Donald answered, in the same low and earnest tones. He could not keep his yearning and passionate eyes from her face. Never had it seemed so precious to him as now, when he looked upon it again after his second though briefer exile.

"And how is Roddie? I was down at Sloy Brig this morning, and the excitement was tremendous."

"So it is yet," answered Donald, with a laugh. "Good old Roddie, what I should have done without him through these days, Fiona, I don't know."

"I knew he would be a comfort to you," she answered; and then a little silence fell upon them which each found it difficult to break.

"We must not stay too long," she said presently. "It would be a shame to leave uncle."

"Just a moment, Fiona. I want to tell you before we go back how I got the ordeal over. It was less terrible than I expected. Roddie was the greatest help and comfort to me, and I have come back convinced beyond a doubt that I may now close for ever that chapter of my life."

"I am glad," she said, in a low, clear voice—"I am glad that you found it less hard than you expected."

"I should like to tell you, Fiona, that never did man

more conscientiously examine his own past actions than I did mine during the time I was back at Ruysfontein. I have many faults, and I have done many wrong and thoughtless deeds in my life, but so far as that part of it was concerned I must hold myself guiltless. I did my duty to the very best of my strength. Do you believe that?"

"Oh, I do, Don, I believe everything you tell me," she answered simply.

"It will be a life-long regret to me, of course," he went on, "because no man unless he is hardened and utterly without regard for others can bear the thought that he may, however unwittingly, have vexed the heart of a fellow-creature. But I want to close the book on that chapter of my life, Fiona. Roddie thinks I may do so and that no good can possibly accrue to me or anybody by morbid dwelling on it."

"That I believe, too," answered Fiona. "Roddie is quite right."

"And through these trying weeks I have been upheld by one thought and hope—the thought and hope of seeing you again. You know that you have been the star of my life since the days when we fished the Garrows burn and played on the braes together."

Fiona answered nothing, but the colour leaped rich and red in her cheek; and in her eyes the light wavered. She knew what was in Donald's heart concerning her, and had no wish to stem the words he wished to say.

"I have always believed in you, Don," she said at length, and these words seemed to open the flood-gates of his soul. All the pent longings of years leaped to find such utterance as would leave no doubt in her mind concerning his meaning. But after all they only found expression in a few faltering words.



“ I HAVE ALWAYS BELIEVED IN YOU, DON,’ SHE SAID.” [Page 240.

“Fiona—I am not worthy. You know what my life has been ; but you cannot guess what I would wish to make it for your sake. Will you help me ; will you be my wife ?”

And all the answer Fiona made, being only a loving woman, whose trust had never faltered, was to lay her head upon his breast. And when he clasped her close, trying to pour out something of the worshipping passion which thrilled him, she put her hand on his lips.

“Hush, hush, Don ! What do I care for all that ? What does a woman want in this world but love ? What do I want but only you ?”

So she gave herself—as such women do—without reserve ; her love so great and wide and unselfish that it knew nothing of limitations or jealousies or doubts.

This perfect and boundless trust stirred in Donald Orde’s heart the highest desire of true manhood, to make himself worthy the sweet creature he had won.

In the whole length and breadth of Scotland there were no happier hearts than those which beat that Christmas Eve in the old house of Garrows.



CHAPTER XXXI.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.



THEY were married during Easter week in the drawing-room at Garrows. Mr. M'Donald performed the ceremony, and there were only a few old friends present. Immediately afterwards they went for a brief honeymoon to a place lent them by a friend on one of the Ross-shire headlands. From thence they journeyed directly to their new home in London. This was according to Maclean's desire. It was easier to bid them farewell on the wedding day in the company of other friends than to face a lonelier parting later on. Before the wedding the old chief had formally acknowledged Donald Orde as his representative and heir; making only one stipulation—that he should add the name of Maclean to his own.

Donald had bought the lease of his beautiful London house from an impecunious nobleman who had run through his fortune, and to whom ready cash was therefore more important than the preservation of his family's town house. Donald had bought it as it stood. He had then called in the help of sundry upholsterers and decorators to make it a fitting abode for its fair young

mistress. The young pair arrived in London on a somewhat cheerless evening, when a drizzling rain filtered through the misty air and obscured the beauty of the Park as they drove through it.

Fiona had asked very few questions indeed about her new home. She knew little or nothing of London, and had certainly not the faintest idea of the magnificence of the houses which were occupied for such a meagre portion of each year.

When the carriage drew up before the house, and the doors were thrown open, the soft white flood of the electric light lay upon the great hall, which seemed to her almost dazzling in its splendour.

"Is this our house, Donald?" she asked wonderingly. "Surely it is very grand? Is there not some mistake?"

"No, Fiona," he answered. "You remember how difficult I found it to interest you in such mundane matters as furniture and decoration? I was obliged to use my own judgment and ask a little timely aid from the tradesfolk. I hope you will like it, my queen." He whispered these two words in a passionate undertone as he half lifted her from the carriage.

She answered nothing, for indeed her heart was full, and she was a little awed by the unexpected grandeur which surrounded her.

A crowd of servants waited to greet her respectfully; and, though much moved, she was able to command herself sufficiently to speak a few kind words to them, and then went upstairs leaning somewhat heavily on her husband's arm.

"I'm a little afraid, Donald," she said as he led her within the doors of her own spacious sitting-room, which had three long windows looking directly out upon the Park. "Do you think I shall be able to uphold your

position here? It is so much more, I think, than I expected."

"Hush, Fiona! You must not speak like that. You could reign in a palace and ennoble it with your presence. I shall want you to go all over the house with me shortly and to give me your frank opinion. It has cost me a great deal of thought. You see it is the only home I shall have the pleasure of arranging for you. I have only, in vulgar parlance, walked into Garrows and hung up my hat."

This caused her to smile, and then she glanced round with keen appreciation at the exquisite colouring and arrangement of the room.

"Won't uncle be pleased when he comes up! We must make him come soon, Donald."

"I expect he won't need much urging," Donald answered. "But we must have just a few days, mustn't we, to settle down? You have belonged to so many people for so long, Fiona, that I am jealous. I would like to shut you up just for a few days and let no one see you but myself. But that, alas, will be impossible here!"

"Will it?" she asked with a wistful, somewhat anxious, look. "Do you know so many people, then?"

"Yes, I know hundreds; and the fact that I have managed to keep our marriage so quiet will make them all the more anxious to see you. You see, my darling, society is never happier than when trying to unearth a mystery. They will come to make state calls on you with their eyes and their ears wide open to see whether there is anything amiss."

"I don't like to hear that, Donald," said Fiona. "If society is like that, I think we need not see very much of it."

“My dear child, you will not be able to help yourself. People will not leave you alone. I am just a little afraid that my wife will become the rage of the season, and that I shall see nothing of her at all.”

“Oh, nonsense, Donald ! When will you learn to be serious and to talk less foolishly to me ?” she said, affecting a sternness she did not feel, for eyes and lips both smiled as she spoke.

They were as happy as two children alone in their new home, going over it together gleefully, sharing a keen and delighted interest in every detail. That night Donald Orde could scarcely sleep for joy. His happiness seemed to lie upon him like a great flood, and he was afraid to try and realise it. The contrast between the present and the years that had gone was so sharp as to be almost painful. Fiona was not disturbed by any qualms. Her large, trustful, exquisite nature accepted the good things of life as the gift of God. She had borne the sadness of waiting years with a large and patient trust ; she accepted her happiness now in the same child-like spirit.

The following morning it was announced in the fashionable intelligence columns that Mr. and Mrs. Orde-Maclean had arrived at Princes Gate for the season, and a few particulars—in the main correct—were added concerning the young wife.

It was read at many breakfast-tables in London that morning, and much commented on. So secret and miserly had Donald Orde been over the great happiness of his life that he had not even whispered it to his most intimate London friends. It was a thing apart. His new life as a public man was full of engrossing interest, sufficient to occupy all his energies and to satisfy his highest ambition ; but it was the old life with its

hallowed associations and simple routine which was shut close in the treasure-house of his heart.

During the earlier part of the Session he had seen a great deal of the Leydens, and had visited frequently at their house in Park Lane. It so happened that the spring was one of unusual bitterness, and that the prevalence of heavy fog caused the fashionable quarters to be more deserted than usual, and the Mediterranean haunts consequently fuller. The Leyden children, accustomed to the clear and rare atmosphere of the Cape, were so perpetually ailing during the first few weeks of their sojourn in London that the doctor peremptorily ordered them abroad, and said that they must not return until the beginning of May. Their governess of course accompanied them, and the only inmates of the Leyden mansion were the millionaire with his wife and eldest daughter. Not even to them had Donald spoken of Fiona, or of his approaching marriage.

It so happened that the younger portion of the Leyden family returned to London on the same day that Donald brought his wife from Scotland. Mrs. Leyden, who had been out at a late party the previous evening, did not come down to breakfast, nor hear the news of the day till lunch-time when her husband returned from the city.

Luncheon was a very free-and-easy meal in the Leyden household. Although there was dinner in the school-room for the younger ones they were allowed, if they felt so disposed, to come to the dining-room. The governess always lunched with the family. The meal was half through before Mr. Leyden came in that day, and it was quite evident that he was brimming over with some important news.

"How are you, my dear?" he said affectionately to his wife. "Rested, I hope. Good morning, Miss Marx ;

I must say you look a little better for your trip, though you have not quite got over the journey. Well, Cicely," he said, turning again to his wife, "will you make a guess at my news? You are pretty sharp as a rule, but I don't think you'll hit at it this time."

"What is it, Leon?" she said languidly. "I am too limp to guess anything this morning. Anything to do with Stocks?"

"Oh no, nothing. It's a piece of purely feminine gossip this, my dear. Somebody you know and esteem very much has got married and stolen a march on us. Will you guess?"

"Man or woman?"

"Man; the most unlikely person in the world, I think you'll agree with me."

Mrs. Leyden continued to shake her head.

"Don't tease me, Leon, but tell me at once!"

"Well, what do you think of our friend Orde having got married in the Easter recess without a word to anybody?"

"No," exclaimed Mrs. Leyden incredulously. "Are you sure it is true?"

"Why, yes, I met him with his wife in Bond Street as I came up."

"That is most extraordinary," said Mrs. Leyden, incredulously still. "What is it, Miss Marx?" she said, her attention directed to the grey pallor in the governess's face. "If you are feeling ill, Adela will go upstairs with you."

"Certainly, mamma," said Miss Leyden, jumping up from her chair. "Why, she is dreadfully ill. She has fainted."

There was some little excitement before the governess could be carried out of the room and upstairs;

but it did not occur to any of them to connect her sudden indisposition with what Van Leyden had been saying.

"I'm afraid she isn't strong, Leon," said his wife carelessly, as the door closed. "It was rather a responsibility bringing her to England. I thought she looked rather ill when she came home yesterday. I must have serious opinion about her at once, then we shall know what we are doing. But come, tell me more about Donald Orde. Are you sure it was he?"

"Well, seeing I spoke to him and had the pleasure of being introduced to his wife, my dear," said Leyden drily, "I don't think there can be much mistake. She's a grandly handsome woman of the stately Puritan type, you know, and there can be no doubt about their adoration for each other."

"Who is she? Not a mèsalliance, then?"

"Oh no. She belongs to an old Highland family, and was brought up at the old Highland castle with Orde. And what do you think he tells me? His uncle has made him his heir on condition that he adds Maclean to his name. So it is to Mrs. Orde-Maclean you must go and pay your respects, my dear."

"But where? Have they taken a furnished house, or what?"

"No, he has bought Lord Waveney's house at Princes Gate and had it all decorated."

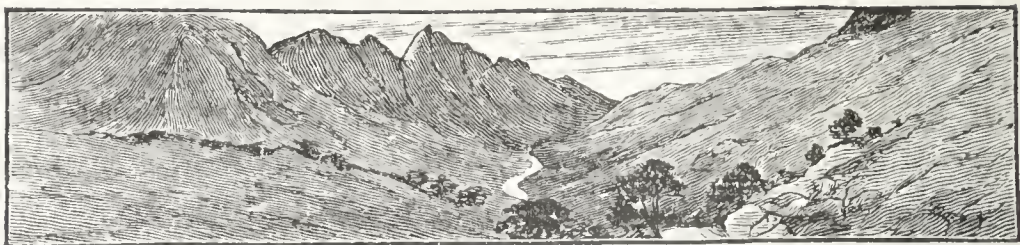
"And without saying a word to me about it. Well, I don't think I shall forgive him; he doesn't deserve it. It would have given me the greatest possible pleasure to have helped him."

"It's all very Scotch, isn't it, Cicely?" said Leyden, as he daintily carved a pigeon's wing. "I think you're quite right, and that you justly owe him a grudge."

But after all he deserves to be happy, poor fellow. It was a sad experience he had with Van Ruysler's daughter, so we mustn't be too hard on him."

"Oh, I sha'n't be hard on him, dear, only I am a little disappointed, that's all," said Mrs. Leyden, and she certainly looked it.

There was perhaps just a slight personal element in her disappointment, for Donald Orde during the first three months of the Parliamentary Session had been her intimate friend, and she had fancied that he regarded her in the light of a sister to whom he could have confided his most private affairs. And yet how completely he had kept her on the outside! Yes, she was disappointed, and it was a long time before she recovered from that disappointment; in fact, it tinged the whole of her future relations with Donald Orde-Maclean and his wife.



CHAPTER XXXII.

A TROUBLED MIND.



DELA LEYDEN had a great deal more in her than most people supposed. She was not a handsome girl, but she had her father's strong, clever face, and had inherited a good deal of his shrewd force of character. She had a very kind and a sympathetic nature ; but she had never taken kindly to Miss Marx, although the younger children were very fond of her. She had not been able to accept her so trustfully and unquestioningly as her step-mother had done, and as she was a good deal with her younger brothers and sisters, and had many opportunities of studying the governess, she had gradually come to the conclusion that she was not what she seemed, but that there was some strange mystery encircling her life. This supposition was of course interesting in the extreme to Adela Leyden, and she found herself unconsciously watching Miss Marx at every turn, though in no unkindly spirit. She was genuinely grieved at her evident feebleness of health, and often thought how fragile she looked and how unfit for her duties of superintending her four somewhat unruly pupils.

There was no doubt about her capability. She was

highly accomplished ; but she lacked the ordinary routine of method and discipline which marks the governess trained to her work. That did not escape Adela's keen eye, and she had woven a very pretty romance around Miss Marx's life. It, however, came very far short of the actual tragic fact.

She stood by the bed while her mother's maid applied the usual restoratives, and when Miss Marx opened her eyes it was upon Adela's face they fell. She had been many times conscious of the silent scrutiny of these large keen eyes, and intuitively felt their deep questioning. Now her face flushed slightly and she sought to turn her head away.

"How stupid of me to make such a fuss!" she said hurriedly. "I hope Mrs. Leyden will forgive me. I'm so sorry, but I couldn't help myself."

"Of course you couldn't," said Adela cheerfully. "Nobody faints for amusement or pleasure. The room was not very hot, I think. What made you faint?"

"I don't know. Something seemed to catch my heart all of a sudden. Do you think Mr. Leyden will be very angry?"

"Angry? Why should he be angry?" echoed Adela. "He will only be very sorry that you are so poorly. Now, you must lie still, and Barker will bring you a cup of tea presently."

"Oh no, I must get up. I am not going to be a useless invalid," cried the governess, starting on her elbow. "I must take the children's lessons as usual."

"I'm sure you will do no such thing," said Adela. "Mamma would never allow it, and they would only be too glad to be let off. Anna will take them for a walk in the Park, and then you will have a quiet afternoon. I suppose your head aches."

"Oh, it does. I ache all over. I wish I were dead," said Miss Marx ; seeming for the first time to lose in some degree her self-control.

Adela bent over her, and laid her kind hand on the governess's flushed brow.

"How hot you are ! I'm afraid you are going to be very ill. We must send for the doctor."

"Oh no, the doctor can do me no good. How kind you all are to me ! If only I could tell you, what a relief it would be."

"You have had some great trouble," said the girl, sitting down by the bed, and speaking in a gentle, soothing tone. "I have known that for a long time. Your eyes are so mournful, and when you are not speaking your whole face is sad. There is more than you have told us. Why don't you tell mamma ? She is so good, and she has such knowledge of the world. She never misunderstands anything or anybody."

"Oh, I could tell her, only I dare not. Perhaps one day, if you will allow me, I will tell you. I shall not live long, Adela, I have received my death-blow."

All this sounded very strange and sad in Adela Leyden's ears, but though she was consumed with desire to hear the sad story of the governess's life, a natural delicacy kept her from asking questions or exhibiting any wish to probe into its hidden chapters.

"I wished to come to England," said Miss Marx presently, "to escape all the memories of my past life ; but memory pursues one everywhere."

"But is your sorrow then so hopeless ?" asked Adela gently. "Will it never come right ?"

"Never—never now," she said, with a note of passionate despair in her voice. "It is too late. But there, I must not keep you talking. I have no right to trouble

you with my troubles. They are my own, and no one can help me to bear them. It was your kind interest which tempted me to speak. You will try and forget it, won't you, Adela?"

"I would like to help you if I could," said Adela, and just then the door opened and Mrs. Leyden entered. She seemed to bring an atmosphere of comfort and strength with her, she was so bright and gay and self-reliant.

"Well, my dear, this is a serious state of affairs, I think," she said, as she stepped swiftly to the side of the bed, her silken skirts rustling and seeming to exhale a subtle and delicate perfume. "I'm glad Adela is with you. Now, tell me the meaning of this sudden collapse. Have you been subject to fainting fits lately?"

"I have had one or two," answered Miss Marx, raising herself on her elbow and looking straight into her employer's face. The short, bright hair which curled on her white brow, and her large, wistful eyes gave her a peculiarly child-like and touching appearance. Mrs. Leyden was struck by the somewhat unearthly beauty of her face.

"Well, I think we must have some advice for you immediately. Perhaps the journey was too much for you, and yet I thought you looked pretty well last night. Is there anything on your mind, my dear?"

This question was put quite suddenly and without premeditation. Adela, keenly watching, saw the pupils of Miss Marx's eyes strangely dilate, but she kept her gaze steadfastly on Mrs. Leyden's face as if nerving herself for some ordeal.

"There is a great deal on my mind, Mrs. Leyden, but nothing which I can share with anybody or which any one can help. I told you when you were so kind

as to engage me without reference or character that I had had a great deal of sorrow and trouble in my life. Believe me, it is only that which troubles me. I don't find things any easier to bear as I grow older, though I have always been told that time will heal."

"So it will, my dear, so it will," said Mrs. Leyden, in cheerful sympathy. "You have got thoroughly run down and want some building up. I'll send for one of the best physicians we have and hear his verdict. Meanwhile, you must lie quite still and take care of yourself. The children can have a holiday for a week at least. Anna can see to them. Perhaps if it is fine to-morrow Adela and you could go for a long day in the country, to Hampton Court or Richmond. You would like that, I am sure."

The childish eyes suddenly overflowed, and with a broken sob she buried her head in the pillow.

"Come, come, my dear, I can't have this at all. You are a bit hysterical," said Mrs. Leyden, in good-humoured remonstrance. "Adela, you had better stay with her a bit, your papa wants me to drive out with him. Don't let her mope too much by herself."

"All right, mamma," said Adela cheerfully.

So Mrs. Leyden, saddened only for the moment, flitted away to her own room to don an elaborate toilette destined to awaken the envy and admiration of half the women in the Park.

After paying two calls on the Bayswater side Mr. and Mrs. Leyden drove slowly through the Park. It was now half-past five and the throng was at its height. The Leydens were well known in fashionable society; their princely entertainments and lavish expenditure of their vast means having opened to them the doors of every great house, while their own many good qualities

had won for them more genuine regard than persons in their position can generally boast of.

Mrs. Leyden's tact and intellect had enabled her to create a unique position for herself. She was an outsider in every sense of the word, yet she had managed to earn for herself the reputation of being one of the most brilliant women in English society, and for her house a reputation as a place where was to be found all those whom it was desirable and difficult to meet. She enjoyed her triumph in a wholesome and unaffected way. She had her own inner circle of friends to whom she was deeply attached, and upon whom she lavished her special favours.

Foremost among these Donald Orde had been, but she was still smarting from the keen disappointment he had inflicted upon her by his absolute silence concerning the most important step in his life. She could not indeed understand it, unless he had feared her censure because he had so quickly forgotten his first unfortunate matrimonial experience.

"Here's the bride and bridegroom," her husband whispered to her quickly, as they passed the Magazine for the second time. "Look! aren't they driving a superb pair, and isn't the whole thing exceptionally well matched and turned out?"

Mrs. Leyden flushed and bit her lip, then gave a sharp order to the coachman to stand still. The approaching carriage, which had a good deal of space to itself, was a highly-swung victoria, drawn by a pair of magnificent roans, which had been one of Maclean's many presents to his niece.

Fiona was dressed entirely in white, even to the lace parasol with its dainty ivory handle. A picture hat worn a little back from the face seemed to throw it out

like an exquisite cameo. It was a face full of such stillness and purity and repose that, once seen, it would never be forgotten. There was an expression of unspeakable peace upon it, and a kind of wondering, trembling, wavering glance in the sweet grey eyes, as if she scarcely dared to realise her own position. Mrs. Leyden in that one long, keen glance saw herself eclipsed, for Fiona's beauty was of that rare type which sets its possessor apart.

Mrs. Leyden was singularly free from the petty jealousies and meaner attributes commonly accredited to her sex, but as she saw the two sitting side by side in the carriage, evidently so engrossed with each other that they saw but little that was passing around them, she did feel a momentary pang. The thought uppermost in her mind was that she would have befriended them gladly, only they had shut her out.

Presently Donald caught sight of the Leydens' carriage, and with quickly flushing face raised his hat high in the air. Leyden responded to it with marked cordiality, at the same time, however, shaking his head with a significant smile.

Mrs. Leyden favoured them by a slight, stiff inclination of the head, which managed to convey to Donald her high displeasure.

"Well, what do you think of her? Isn't she a stunner?" said Leyden the moment the carriage passed them.

"She is certainly handsome," his wife admitted, but without interest or enthusiasm.

"Fancy a noble creature like that being shut up in a Highland glen for a quarter of a century! She looks twenty-five, don't you think? But she's just at her best. Won't she create a sensation? Don't you see everybody

looking at her now ? How soon will you go and call ? I'm anxious to hear your verdict on her."

"I don't feel like going at all, Leon, and that's the truth," said Mrs. Leyden quickly ; and when, struck by something in her voice, he leaned forward to look in her face he saw two large tears in her eyes.

"Hallo, old girl, has it cut you up so rough as that?"

"I do feel it, Leon, I won't pretend I don't. I was very fond of Donald, and it was too bad of him to leave me to learn of his marriage from the daily papers."

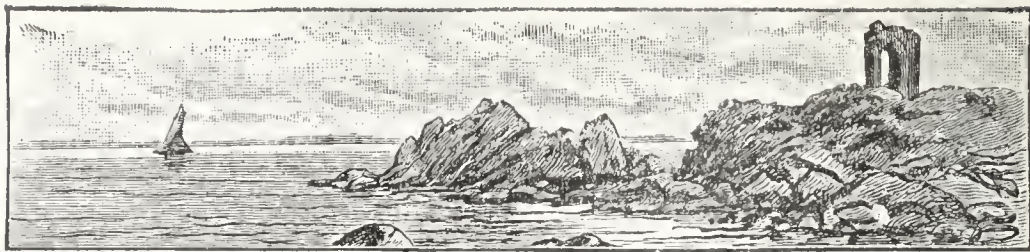
"He may have had his reasons, dear. I wouldn't be too hard on him till you hear what he has to say for himself. Besides, you simply must know her, and if I were you I'd be among the first."

"I believe you're right, and I'm a goose, Leon," she said, slipping her hand into his under the carriage rug. "I think she'll be worth knowing, so perhaps I will go to-morrow and I shall take Adela. She is the sort of person I am sure it would be good for a young girl to know."

Leyden's face flushed slightly, and it was with rare pleasure. He was very fond of his children, and to hear his wife express such a sentiment pleased him more than he dared to express ; for sometimes she kept him at arm's length and would not let him say all he wished.

"Adela is a lucky girl, Cicely, to have you to chaperon her," was all he ventured to say. She turned to him suddenly, with a gleam of laughter in her eyes.

"I'd do my duty by the children, Leon, if there were a hundred of them, and Adela will never make a fool of herself or anybody. She has all her father's common sense."



CHAPTER XXXIII.

HER NEW ESTATE.



NEXT day, in obedience to a summons from Mrs. Leon Leyden, a distinguished physician called at the house in Park Lane. If he felt any surprise at being summoned to look at the governess he made no sign. He had heard of the Leydens and the munificence of their kindness to all who came in contact with them, and he was much impressed by the motherly interest Mrs. Leyden evidently took in the delicate-looking girl, who seemed to feel her position rather more keenly than usual. He came to the conclusion that she must be a relative of the Leydens, or at least something more than an ordinary governess.

"Well, I don't find much wrong," he said, as they went downstairs after he had examined his patient. "In fact, there is not a trace of organic disease, but there is great debility and a marked hysterical condition. Do you happen to know anything of her family history?"

"No, nothing except that she is an orphan. I engaged her at the last moment while we were preparing to leave Kimberley; I was rather taken with her, and didn't trouble about references. What I really wanted was

some one to be with the elder children on the steamer, but she was not much use in that way. She never came on deck during the whole voyage."

"Then you know nothing about her private affairs at all?" said the doctor suggestively.

"Nothing. Except that she has told me several times that she has had a great deal of trouble. My daughter is constantly saying to me that Miss Marx has something on her mind. Perhaps you share that opinion?"

"I do. She is evidently brooding on some real or imaginary trouble, and until she is relieved of that she will not improve. In fact, the chances are that she will get worse, and finally sink into a decline."

"Dear me, I didn't anticipate anything quite so serious as that, Dr. Westcott. But how can I help her? I can't force her confidence."

"No, that is true. There is really nothing you can do, Mrs. Leyden, except order her nourishing food and see that she eats it, and insist on out-door exercise and as much distraction as possible."

"You think that London is quite healthy for her, then?"

Dr. Westcott waved his hand towards the open window, from which could be obtained an exquisite glimpse of the great trees in the Park waving greenly against the sunny sky.

"Madam, if a person cannot live in London in such weather as this she cannot live anywhere, and she doesn't deserve to live," he said grimly.

"Will you come back and see her?" asked Mrs. Leyden, smiling at the doctor's caustic words.

"I will if you like, but I can't do her the slightest good. I think you had better send for me if you wish to see me."

So saying the great physician went his way, wishing

that he could hold up Mrs. Leyden as an example to many of the fashionable women on his list, who had no interest beyond their own ailments and the adorning of their persons.

When Mrs. Leyden went back to Miss Marx's room she found her sitting by the open window watching the doctor's handsome carriage drive away.

"Well, my dear, the report is satisfactory so far," she said kindly. "He says there is not anything seriously the matter with you, but that it is absolutely necessary that you bestir yourself and try and throw off this melancholy which oppresses you. You seem to me to be a great deal worse since you came to London, and yet I'm sure it is a pleasant place to live in."

"Oh, very. I will try and do what you say; and if I don't improve, Mrs. Leyden, I must leave you. I feel keenly at giving you so much trouble."

"Tuts, that's nothing; but of course, to speak quite frankly, I should like you to be brighter for the children's sake. It is depressing for them to see you so distressed."

"I quite understand. Yes, I will try; and if I can't succeed you will allow me to leave. I will leave now if you like."

"No, I don't like. We have all got very fond of you, the children especially so. If you will only try and look at things from a philosophical point of view—of course I don't know the nature of the trouble which seems to lie so heavily on your heart; but I have had my own in the course of my life, my dear—and one thing I can say with authority, that no good ever comes of brooding too much on what is past and cannot be undone. The better plan is to look forward and try and make the best of what remains."

So saying, and with a kindly pat on the shoulder,

Mrs. Leyden went off to dress to make her first call on Mrs. Orde-Maclean.

She took great pains with her toilette, and also supervised Adela's, anxious, although she could not have told why, to make a good impression upon the young wife fresh from the Highland hills, though it was impossible that she could be critical or severe in her judgment.

In her dainty carriage toilette, carefully chosen by her step-mother, Adela Leyden looked an interesting, even a striking figure. They were very good friends, and their talk never flagged as they drove the short distance between Park Lane and Princes Gate. Two carriages already stood before the house to which they were bound.

"That's the Duchess of Stronvar's carriage, Adela," whispered Mrs. Leyden quickly. "We shall be quite eclipsed, I fear; perhaps Mrs. Orde-Maclean will not covet the honour of our acquaintance."

"Now, mamma, don't be cynical," said Adela quickly. "You know that everybody wants to know you."

Then they stepped within the spacious hall, and Mrs. Leyden's quick eyes roamed from side to side, taking in even the smallest details of furnishing and arrangement. Her heart beat a little faster as their names were announced at the drawing-room door, but rather at the prospect of seeing Donald Orde, whom she did not at once intend to restore to the sunshine of her favour.

There were two ladies in the room besides Donald and his wife. The elderly duchess, who was known to be one of the stiffest and most exclusive of Scotch peeresses, Mrs. Leyden had no acquaintance with, nor did she know the other caller. Donald came forward quickly, not in the least embarrassed. He was quite

unconscious of having done anything to give offence. He had chosen to keep his marriage a secret so far as was in his power, shrinking with a natural reserve from the usual society comment which such an event calls forth. He was genuinely pleased that his friend should have called so promptly, nor did he just at the moment observe the particular iciness of her greeting.

"Fiona," he said quickly, "you have heard me speak of Mrs. Leyden and of her great kindness to me. She has crowned it all by coming so quickly to bid you welcome to London."

Fiona came forward, her face wearing a sweet smile, her eyes speaking a welcome even before her lips uttered it.

As Mrs. Leyden clasped the soft, firm white hand and looked into the clear, exquisite depths of the grey eyes, the slight resentment she had been harbouring seemed to fall away from her, and a great longing to win some regard from such a peerless creature took its place.

"Your husband has allowed me to call myself his friend," she said with a quick emotion. "I trust you will extend me the like privilege?"

Fiona inclined her head and returned the pressure of the kind hand which held hers. Then she welcomed Adela, who was speechless with admiration of Fiona's beauty. It was enhanced by the exquisite becomingness of the gown she wore—a long flowing robe of white velvet so skilfully cut that it seemed to reveal rather than to hide each graceful curve of her slender figure. The dead white, so trying to most women, suited her admirably and gave to her a touch of individuality which seemed to set her apart.

The Duchess of Stronvar, who had been mightily pleased with the Orde-Maclean alliance, although she

was connected with a very distant branch of the family, did not at all approve of the sudden appearance of the African millionaire's wife. She belonged to the old *régime*, and though her family was very poor she had a sublime contempt for the *nouveaux riches*, and absolutely declined in her own person any acquaintance with them; indeed, one of her favourite occupations was to deplore in season and out of season the degeneracy of the society which places money before everything else.

Donald Orde was much amused at the haste with which the old lady took herself off at the entrance of the Leydens. As he took her downstairs on his arm she seized the opportunity to administer a word of timely reproof and warning.

"You must not allow your wife to get mixed up with such objectionable people, Maclean. She is fit to be the queen of us all, but remember that she is very unsophisticated in the world's ways and will look to you for guidance. If she forms undesirable connections to begin with her position can never be retrieved. I think you had better put her under my wing, and I promise you that she shall only know those whom it is desirable she should."

Now, Donald was himself essentially democratic in spirit, and the old lady's remarks mightily amused him.

"Fiona is not a child, Duchess," he said laughingly, "and she has a good deal of discrimination. I don't think you need be afraid for her. As for Mrs. Leyden, you forget that her position cannot be questioned. She and her husband have been received at Marlborough House, to say nothing of other great houses."

"Well, there's something wrong, that's all," muttered the old lady grumblingly, "and I don't approve of it. Well, I'm greatly pleased with your wife, Maclean, and

with you, up to a certain point. I'm disappointed in the side you have taken, of course, but as long as you don't mix yourself up with the more extreme members of your party I won't say you are beyond redemption."

So saying she shook hands with him and then shook her ebony stick at him significantly as she drove away. Donald hastened back to the drawing-room, anxious to discern what impression Fiona would make upon Mrs. Leyden. The opinion of the old duchess did not concern him much, if at all. Almost immediately the other lady also took her leave, and only the Leydens were left:

"Now, Mrs. Orde-Maclean," said Mrs. Leyden gaily, "I am going to rate your husband soundly before you. Don't you think it was too bad of him to steal such a march upon us all, but especially upon me? I did think I might have been told. What were you afraid of?" she added, turning quickly to Donald.

"I wasn't afraid of anything, Mrs. Leyden," answered Donald as gaily, "only I was determined that our marriage should not be paragraphed and commented upon in every printed rag, and my wife was of my opinion."

"You see I know so little, Mrs. Leyden," said Fiona with her sweet, bright smile. "I've to do as I am bid, and when Donald said to me it was better no one should know in London until all was over, why, then, I thought it was all right, don't you see?"

"You are going to be a model, my dear," said Mrs. Leyden with a nod. "Don't you know that this sort of thing has gone out, and it is the husbands who are in the minority now?"

"The old-fashioned way is good enough for me," she said simply. "Is not London beautiful just now? I had no idea it could be so lovely. I was only saying

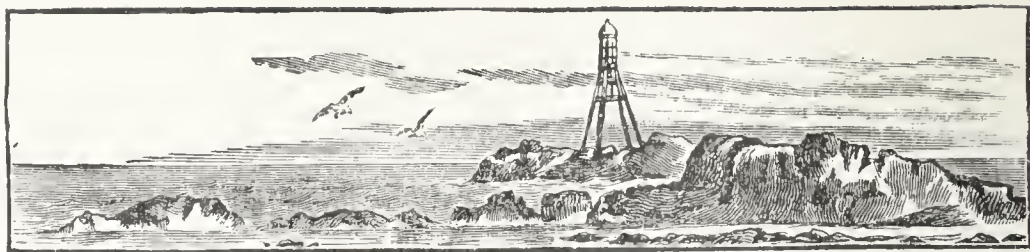
to my husband this morning that I do not believe I shall miss the Glen at all."

"That is very high praise," said Mrs. Leyden. "How is that delightful friend of yours, Dr. MacAlister? I hope he will pay you a visit, so that we may meet again."

"Oh yes, he is coming very soon. In fact, I believe he is going to fetch my uncle in about a fortnight. We are so anxious for our uncle to come while the weather is so glorious and everything so beautiful to look upon. What will you say, Mrs. Leyden, when I tell you that he has only been once in London, and that was so long ago as the Queen's Coronation?"

"It takes one back to another age entirely," said Mrs. Leyden with a slight sigh. "We are all so sated and *blasé* it is delightful to hear of such a thing. I hope that you will give me the great privilege of meeting your uncle when he comes? I am sure he would be a most interesting figure."

"He is a dear, simple old man," said Fiona quietly, and her soft eyes filled with sudden tears.



CHAPTER XXXIV.

HOPES AND FEARS.



THE Leydens drove round the Park before returning home, and their talk was all of the inexpressible charm and beauty of Orde-Maclean's wife. Seldom had Mrs. Leyden felt so drawn to any one at a first meeting, and she felt an almost overwhelming desire to stand high on the list among Fiona's friends. It was quite evident that Donald had talked with affection and esteem of them to his young wife, and that she was prepared to accept them as friends.

"We must give a great entertainment, Adela," she said to her step-daughter. "Something which will quite eclipse anything we have done before, not a great show, but something very *recherché* and select. We will make the invitations to be coveted and sought after, and we shall not have one refusal."

"That will be delightful, mamma," said Adela enthusiastically. "How pleasant it is to live in London and to have you!"

The words came sincerely from the girl's heart and were quick to find a response. Mrs. Leyden leaned forward a little and looked into her step-daughter's fine eyes with a peculiar softness in her own.

"My dear, do you know that is a very sweet speech?"

she said. "I only wish some of my Washington friends could hear it. They predicted all sorts of dreadful complications in the family after I should have entered it ; but I think that on the whole we get on very well."

"We are as happy as we possibly can be, mamma, and papa is a different man," said Adela quietly. "I can never be grateful enough to him for bringing you to us, or to you in coming."

This generous testimony was all the more precious because unsought from the eldest and most discriminating of her husband's children. It was the crowning touch to what had been a singularly happy and interesting afternoon, and many remarked that day that the beautiful Mrs. Leyden seemed in radiant and healthy spirits as she bowed right and left from her carriage to her many acquaintances.

As she passed up to her own room, Adela looked in to see whether Miss Marx had obeyed the doctor's instructions to rest every afternoon. She was lying on the bed with her arms folded above her head ; an open book at which she had never looked lay on the counterpane beside her. As she saw the elegant figure of Adela Leyden come in at the door she felt a vague envy of her youth and her freedom from care. The rustling of her silken skirts gave the governess a faintly jealous pang. Once it had been her privilege to wear the richest and best that money could buy without counting the cost.

"How do you feel now?" asked Adela with a quick, joyous ring in her voice. "I think you look better now you have rested. If you would only take a little care I am sure you would be all right. We have had such a nice afternoon. Where do you think we have been?" She sat down on the edge of the bed and began to unbutton her gloves.

"Driving in the Park, perhaps."

"Yes, we did that, but first we went to call on the bride."

"What bride?" asked Miss Marx, although she knew very well to whom Adela referred.

"Why, Mrs. Orde-Maclean, and she is charming, lovely, everything that is beautiful and perfect," cried the girl enthusiastically. "She will certainly create a sensation wherever she goes."

"Tell me about her, everything about her. It is so nice to hear what goes on outside when one cannot join in it."

"Well, they have taken a house in Princes Gate, and the house itself is interesting, but you forget all about it when you see its mistress. I have never seen any one in the least like her. She is so tall and stately, just like a lily. Do you know what I kept thinking of all the time I was looking at and listening to her?"

"No," said the governess faintly.

"Why, Philomena in Longfellow's poem. She just looks like one who would guide and help every one in the right way. She wore a white velvet gown. Can't you imagine her, Miss Marx?—tall and stately with the loveliest clear complexion, although she has no colour. Yet she does not look delicate or sickly, but the very picture of health. And then her manner is so gracious and so kind, so utterly unaffected. She is like a queen. Mamma says it is because she has been brought up among those green hills of Scotland away from every contamination."

"Mrs. Leyden approved of her also, then?" said the governess, in a queer, strained voice.

"Oh yes, mamma was enthusiastic. I never saw her so enthusiastic about any one. And we are going to give a grand entertainment in her honour. Don't you think it is interesting to meet such people?"

"Oh very, but tell me more about them. I have heard you talk so much of them that I feel as interested as if I knew them," said the governess feverishly. "Tell me, do they seem attached to each other? Is he very fond of her?"

"I should think he is. Perhaps you have never known any Scotchmen. They do not make a fuss about their feelings. But if you saw how he looks at her with adoration in his eyes, and sometimes she smiles at him. Have you ever seen a smile which seems to convey the most perfect love and trust? That is hers."

"They must be a very happy couple, but will it last?" said the governess, with a faint touch of cynicism in her low voice.

"Why, yes, of course, why shouldn't it last? It is only common minds that ever change. I could almost predict that in twenty years they will be more devoted to each other than they are now." So Adela spoke out of the fulness of her girlish enthusiasm, little dreaming how every word sank a poisoned arrow into the heart of the despairing woman who listened to them.

"Just think, Miss Marx, the old gentleman who brought up Mrs. Orde-Maclean is nearly eighty, and has never been in London since the year of the Queen's Coronation. He is actually coming in a fortnight to pay them a visit. Dr. MacAlister is bringing him; he is evidently a great friend of the family."

A gleam of satisfaction crossed the governess's pale face at this announcement.

"Oh, I should like to see him; he did me a great deal of good on board ship. Do you think Mrs. Leyden would allow him to come and see me while he is in London?"

"Why, I am sure she would if it would do you any good. He is sure to be a great deal here; for mamma

has quite made up her mind that she is going to be very intimate with Mr. and Mrs. Orde-Maclean, and she generally manages to get most things she sets her heart on."

"She is a happy woman," said the governess, with a touch of bitterness. "Now I must get up and go and superintend the schoolroom tea. I have been lying here over two hours in obedience to Dr. Westcott's orders, but I feel lazy and useless and good for nothing, and I am sure that the best service Mrs. Leyden could do herself would be to dismiss me from her employment."

"If you will take that horrid view of the case, why then you can," said Adela, springing up with a sudden outburst of indignation. "We can do no more; but, of course, if you have made up your mind that you are useless, and that nobody wants you here, it can't be helped."

So saying Adela marched out of the room with her head in the air. She was a very sensible girl and sympathetic up to a certain point, but she could not help thinking that the governess was carrying her morbid introspection rather far. This little outburst of indignation on Adela's part was not without its good effect, however, on Miss Marx.

Directly she was left alone she got up with some considerable alacrity and began to make her toilette. As she looked in the long mirror, which gave her back the reflection of a face very pallid and shorn of much of its former beauty, a great and bitter anger rose in her.

"Beautiful as an angel, is she? and their happiness is idyllic. I wonder what she would say, I wonder what they would all say, if they knew that here stands the woman who, by simply revealing herself, could shatter it all? Why should she have so much, and be fawned upon and praised by every one, while I, who have done no harm, should suffer so much and be con-

demned to this obscurity ? It is my place she is filling. What is to hinder me from claiming what is mine by right ? ”

The awful and disastrous consequences of the step she had taken seemed to array themselves before her as she brooded upon them. As she deftly brushed out her bright hair she pictured the catastrophe which she by one word, or by simply appearing before the eyes of Donald Orde, could cause to fall upon that happy house. As she so pictured it a sense of power and victory caused her pale cheeks to flush and her dull eyes to brighten. She was poor, and obscure, and unknown, yet what havoc she could create if so minded ! At any moment, by a simple revelation of her identity, she could provide society with the richest and most dramatic tit-bit it had enjoyed for many a year. The thought awakened in her all the baser and more selfish part of her nature. Long suffering and the anguish of remorse and unavailing regret had not done anything towards softening the unhappy Julie Van Ruysler's nature, but rather had been a hardening process, which caused her to lose sight of the greatness and awful cruelty of her sin ; for not only had she out of pure self-will destroyed her own happiness and home, but she had brought desolation and despair within near touch of those who had never wronged her. It indeed waited upon their threshold like an avenging enemy, slow to strike, but whose blow would be sure and fatal when it fell.

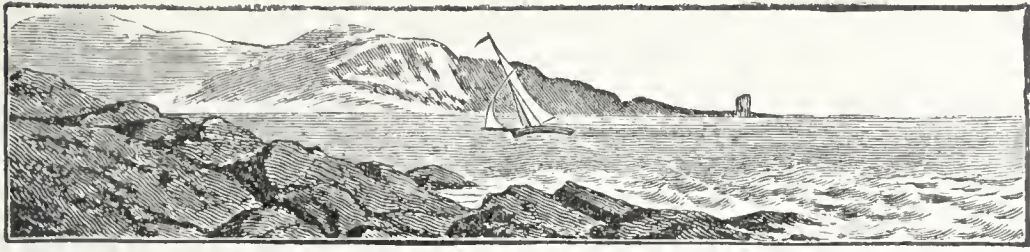
That night Fiona, with her husband, made her first appearance in society at a great reception at the Foreign Office. Although he had been but a few months in Parliament, Donald had already made a mark sufficient to single him out from the rank and file of his brother members. He had great natural abilities, and his

experience of colonial life had given a wideness and justness to his views, which pleased, while it surprised, those to whom he revealed them. A fine person such as his also won regard and attention from others, and he had a noble gift of speech which enabled him to express himself clearly and forcibly, and yet in choicewords which made a pleasant sound in the ears of those who heard them. The leaders of the party, ever on the outlook for gifted supporters among their younger followers, were disposed to pay him a good deal of attention, and when they appeared somewhat late in the great reception rooms that night they were both singled out for special marks of favour by those whose favour is coveted.

Fiona wore her wedding gown, and her entrance caused a little flutter in the room. It was absolutely her first appearance in London society. Her beauty before her marriage had not been the common talk of the multitude, but was now revealed to them for the first time in its full stateliness and power.

The Prime Minister begged the favour of an immediate introduction, and remained so long talking by her side that it attracted much attention.

Donald felt his heart beat with intoxicating happiness and pride as he witnessed Fiona's triumph. She herself was so exquisitely serene and calm, so unconscious of her own charm, of everything save that she now entered for the first time her husband's world. She was anxious only to win his approving smile. As the great statesman, who had been charmed with her simple and winning manner, relinquished her to her husband's care, he whispered in his ear, "You have won a priceless treasure. Take care of her. She will yet be one of our brightest ornaments. You may well account yourself one of the happiest of men."



CHAPTER XXXV.

IN THE BACKGROUND.



T took Fiona some little time to become accustomed to the many changes of habit which her new life necessarily involved. The late hours were just at first the most trying of them all. In the old house of Garrows everything had been still and dark long before midnight, whereas now it was always midnight and often the small hours before Donald returned from the House. They went out a good deal in the evening, as was to be expected. Invitation cards were showered upon them, and Fiona had no reason to complain of the coolness of her reception in London society.

It was very interesting to Donald Orde to watch the nice discrimination Fiona displayed in her treatment of those to whom she was introduced. She seemed to know by some delicate intuition whose acquaintance it was desirable to cultivate. She seldom erred in her judgment, still more seldom did she afterwards alter the impression once obtained. From the moment when it was settled that she was to share the future of Donald Orde she set herself to make a study of politics, so that she might be able to enter fully into all his interests and ambitions ; and he was constantly surprised by the

clearness of her judgment and the quickness of her perception, and found himself confiding in and consulting her at every turn. So life was very fair to them in these early days, full of a thousand engrossing interests and hallowed by the tenderest of happiness, of which they scarcely dared allow themselves to speak.

"What do you think, Fiona?" said Donald, when he returned one night from the House shortly after midnight. "Hamish Chisholme has been returned unopposed for the Islands, and he will take his seat in the House to-morrow."

"Oh!" said Fiona, but her voice expressed only the faintest interest. "Surely he will be satisfied now. He was extremely anxious to obtain a seat, wasn't he?"

"Very, I think, or he would not have troubled about the Islands. Perhaps his mother will come with him for the season at least; but it is not necessary that we should see much of them."

"It will be better, I think, if we don't," said Fiona. "I like Lady Chisholme very well, but I shall never forget the rancour of the contest in the glens, and I don't think that I shall care to have any further acquaintance with Sir Hamish Chisholme."

Donald looked at her with a slightly amused smile.

"I should not like to hear you speak about me in that fashion, Fiona. You have a calm, grand way of sitting upon people—if I may be allowed a vulgar expression. Have you had a dull evening alone? That is one of the drawbacks to Parliamentary life for which, I think, I hardly prepared you. You see, a man in rooms doesn't notice it, but is glad to have all his spare time occupied."

"Oh, I have not been dull," answered Fiona brightly.

"I have read a good bit, and just before you came in I had another look at uncle's rooms. They are really very nice, Donald, and I am sure he will be pleased. Just think, they will be here to-morrow night."

Her face shone with contentment as she uttered these words.

"You have not missed him too much, dear, I hope?" he said quickly.

"Oh no; but, of course, he is an old man, Don, and I have always been with him. I should be perfectly happy, I think, if I could induce him to stay here all the summer with us, then my mind would be quite easy. Do you think he will stay?"

"He might," said Donald, but in his heart of hearts he did not believe that there was the faintest chance of it. "You see it is not easy for a man who has lived all his life in a Highland glen to take kindly to the ways of a great city, and, of course, our life is very different from the old life at Garrows. How do you like it, on the whole?"

"I like it very much. It interests me, but it also saddens me. There are so many restless, unhappy faces. It seems to me to be a constant struggle and strife after what is either impossible to attain or unsatisfying after it is obtained. And they are so uncharitable, the women especially. They are never happier than when blaming somebody or trying to show up their faults."

"That is a heavy indictment, my dear," said Donald, "but I believe you are right in the main. Yet there must be a good leaven in the mass, after all, or it would not hold together. Do you know that already you are making your mark, and to belong to your set is to put a certain hall-mark on position and conduct?"

"Oh, Donald, how can you say such a thing? I have only been a month here," she said with slightly flushing cheek. "One thing I cannot and will not listen to is discussion of the scandals which are either in the newspapers or known of privately. Do you know that yesterday I came out of Lady Tredegar's drawing-room because they were talking like that? It is not as if they were sympathetic or interested about it; they seem to gloat over the details. That is not the way to raise the tone, is it, Donald?"

"Indeed it is not. I am glad that you are taking such a firm stand, Fiona, though it is nothing less than I expected. I knew that you would find much in our new life to sadden and depress you, but you will be helped by the thought that you can do something towards creating a purer air."

"That is what I like so much about Mrs. Leyden, Donald. She is so very charitable, and if she cannot say something kind about people she does not speak about them at all. I like her very much."

"I am glad of that. I like her myself, Fiona, and did from the first moment I saw her. I think she has quite got over her disappointment at not having been told about our marriage. I had no idea that it could have hurt her so keenly."

"Yes, it did hurt her. She has spoken of it to me more than once. I think you could have told her without fear of the matter becoming public property."

"I believe I could, but I was jealous of everything connected with you, my darling. I could not bear the thought of having your name on every lip. It is not much better now, I must say," he added with a laugh. "But somehow now you verily belong to me I don't seem to mind it so much."

"You are quite pleased with me, Donald?" she asked with a sudden, wistful look in her large, sweet eyes.

"Pleased with you? What on earth do you mean by such a question, Fiona? If I were not pleased, uplifted to the skies almost, I should be the veriest ingrate. What do you mean by such a speech?"

"I mean you are not disappointed in me. You see I am very ignorant of the ways of your world. I am not a great lady. I can only look on and try and copy the best examples."

"No, you can't," said Donald with a grimness all assumed. "You needn't try to be so humble, my lady. You are the greatest *grande dame* among them. It is you who will have a crowd of imitators, but you will never have a peer."

"You make too much of me, I am afraid, Donald," she said quickly; and placing her two hands on his tall shoulders she lifted her fair, exquisite face to his. "Life seems so full, my heart trembles sometimes lest such happiness cannot last."

"Hush, dearest. Why should it not? We have both suffered, and surely you who suffered so innocently ought to have some compensation. It is only right that you should be happy. Happiness is your heritage. I only pray continually to be made worthy of you."

It was not often that they, even to each other, drew back the veil from the inner sanctuary. Although Fiona's face bore the stamp of her great happiness, it also at times seemed to wear the seal of a profound sadness. Many times her heart was oppressed vaguely with a sense of insecurity. She seemed to hold her happiness from day to day as a precarious, almost a fleeting, treasure. And these strange feelings, which all the fulness of the days could not altogether dispel, gave

a certain pensive and *spirituelle* expression to her beauty which made it still more a thing apart.

"Well, what is the programme for to-day?" Donald said as they breakfasted together next morning gaily, all the vague sadness of the night banished by the glorious radiance of the summer sunshine.

"Oh, I have a long programme," answered Fiona brightly. "I have to be at the dressmaker's at twelve, from there I go to lunch with the duchess at one, then to the *fête* which the Princess is to open at Hammersmith at three. Then I promised Mrs. Leyden I would go back with her to tea. I am glad we have no evening engagement, because of uncle and Roddie. They will be here at seven, I suppose. Will you meet them, or shall I?"

"I shall, of course," said Donald quickly. "I shall go on my way back from the House, and then after dinner Roddie will perhaps go back with me. The debate will be rather lively to-night. Your uncle will be tired, and will go to bed early."

Fiona went through her long programme bravely, and at Mrs. Leyden's door sent the carriage away, saying she would walk home after tea. As she stepped within the great marble hall of the magnificent mansion which the Leydens had made their temporary home, the two younger girls, whom she knew but slightly, came downstairs with their governess. They ran to her at once.

"Oh, Mrs. Maclean, I do wish we were not going out when you are here, but mamma says we must. When will you come to lunch with us so that we may have a long talk with you?"

"One day soon, my dears. Is this Miss Marx, of whom I have heard so much?" She extended her hand kindly, but to her astonishment the governess did not see it, or ignored it. "I hope you are feeling stronger?"



"SHE EXTENDED HER HAND KINDLY."

[Page 278.]

she said kindly, noting with sympathetic interest the sharp outline and extreme paleness of the governess's face.

"There is nothing the matter with me, thank you," said Miss Marx, almost rudely. "Come, children, or we shall be too late again."

Fiona looked slightly put out. She was not accustomed to having her gracious words so rudely received.

"Why, Miss Marx, what can you mean?" cried Emmie, the elder girl, indignantly. "Do you know this is dear Mrs. Orde-Maclean, whom we all love so much and whom you have been so anxious to see?"

"Don't worry Miss Marx, dear," said Fiona gently. "No doubt she has a headache and feels out of sorts. The lovely air will do you all good; so off you go. Good-afternoon."

She kissed the children, nodded kindly to Miss Marx, and began to ascend the stairs, saddened for the moment by the look and manner of the girl she had left. It was one of Mrs. Leyden's afternoons and the drawing-room was full. Every one turned to look when Mrs. Orde-Maclean's name was announced. Already all her social appearances were noted, her words treasured and repeated, her gowns copied by the lesser satellites in the sphere in which she moved. But her serene unconsciousness of it all was the one attribute which could neither be copied nor understood.

"So glad you have come, my dear," whispered Mrs. Leyden, as she went up to receive her. "Did a little bird whisper that we were talking, not exactly of you, but of your drawing-room gown? Everybody is anxious to know what it is going to be, but I said it was a secret still."

"Oh dear, I am so tired of it all," cried Fiona with a sigh. "I have been lunching with the duchess,

and her instructions were so many and so varied that I ought to have written them all down. She is so afraid I don't do her credit, and she says everybody is too flippant nowadays about presentation, because it has become too common."

"My advice to you is to forget everything," said Mrs. Leyden daringly. "Nobody instructed poor me and I got through without a hitch. Now there is Adela dying to come and speak to you, to say nothing of a score more, so I must be unselfish for once."

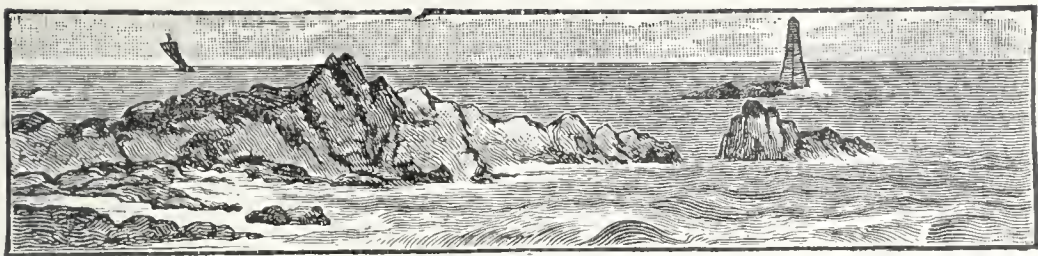
"I saw Emmie and Flora downstairs with their governess. How very ill she looks, Mrs. Leyden! She seems altogether out of sorts."

"Oh, I think she is getting all right. I have left off fussing so much over her," said Mrs. Leyden carelessly, and in a moment the throng separated them.

About an hour later, as she walked across the Park to her own gate, Fiona met Jan Groot, her husband's valet, coming from Knightsbridge way carrying a parcel. She gave him a pleasant nod, and then struck by something in his face asked whether he felt well.

"Yes, ma'am, thank you," he answered; but his look belied him, and his teeth were chattering in his head as they had chattered that awful day when Ruysfontein lost its mistress.

"You look as if you had seen a ghost, Jan, exactly," she said; and he smiled a ghastly smile as he stood aside to let his mistress pass through the Park gate. As a matter of fact Jan Groot had seen a ghost in the person of Mrs. Leyden's governess sitting on one of the Park chairs with her pupils on either side. And she had seen him too,



CHAPTER XXXVI.

FROM THE GLEN.



FROM that moment there was neither rest nor peace of mind for Jan Groot. He was a great favourite with the rest of the servants, who were chiefly Scotch, some of them having come from Garrows, where they had proved his kindness of heart and willingness to help wherever a helping hand was necessary. Having been so long at Ruysfontein he knew sufficient of the ways of great houses to know the wisdom of keeping his own counsel. He therefore said nothing about the awful fear which was haunting him, although many remarked on his looks when he entered the servants' hall. It somehow was an unspeakable comfort to Jan to reflect that the old Laird and the young doctor from the Glen would that night sleep under his master's roof; so Fiona would have her own kin near her should any catastrophe overtake her.

As he opened the drawers to take out his master's evening clothes he caught sight of Lizzie, Mrs. Maclean's maid, coming along the passage carrying her mistress's empty tea-tray. The two were great friends. Lizzie was an Inverness girl whom Fiona had engaged on the recommendation of the duchess; a dainty, pretty

creature with a soft voice and a peculiarly bewitching smile. She was a great deal more interested in Jan than the simple fellow dreamed of. Thoughts of love and marriage were far from his mind as a rule, devotion to his master and mistress being the only litany of his life.

Struck by his pale and miserable look Lizzie put her head round the half-opened door as she passed and asked him whether he felt well.

"Yes, I'm quite well ; but I would like to ask you a question, Lizzie, if you will answer it ?"

"All right, Jan," said Lizzie. "What is it ?"

"It is something which I have been thinking of and which is troubling me a little," he answered. "Can you tell me what would happen in this country supposing a man were to marry a second time thinking his wife was dead ; and then, if afterwards he found that she was not dead ?"

"It would be a nice pickle," said Lizzie meditatively. "I'm not sure if they would not try him for bigamy ; but I don't see either how they could if he married a second time in ignorance."

"Would he be obliged to go and live with his first wife—that's what I would like to know?" said Jan with unconcealed anxiety.

"No, he wouldn't be obliged, but he would have to leave the second one. At least she wouldn't be his wife, you know ; but of course she could please herself."

"She would be the one to suffer most, then," said Jan meditatively, and with his head turned away he industriously brushed imaginary dust off his master's coat.

"I should think she would," said Lizzie. "But what makes you ask such a queer question, Mr. Groot ? Have you been married twice yourself, or what ?"

“Oh no,” answered Jan simply. “It’s only something I heard of, that was all.”

For the moment he felt tempted to make a confidante of the bright, happy-looking girl ; but the temptation was only momentary, because he immediately reflected that the secret was not his and that perhaps a good deal might yet depend on it being kept.

There was not room for any doubt in his mind that the woman he had seen in the Park was his master’s former wife. She had looked at him with clear and undeniable recognition in her eyes, nor had she appeared in the least disturbed—rather there was a calm triumph in her look which seemed to say that she had much in her power. It was indeed that look which troubled Jan most of all.

About an hour later Fiona stood in the wide, tessellated hall, and when the door was thrown open she ran forward to welcome her uncle, her eyes full of happy tears and her heart beating with a strange commingling of joy and emotion and pride. There was no sign of weariness or fatigue in Maclean’s bearing as he stepped within the door, taking his bonnet from his white head as he went forward to greet the dear girl who had made the sunshine of the old house of Garrows, and who was now a great lady, honoured by the favour of the highest in the land.

“Oh, uncle, uncle dear,” she cried, “how delightful it is to see you ! I’m so glad. I don’t think I knew until now when I see you how very much I have missed you.”

These words were sweet in the old man’s ears. He clasped her to his heart with unspeakable tenderness, but was too much moved to say a word in reply to this true welcome.

Roddie stood patiently by, looking round with a somewhat quizzical air at the magnificence of the house. But presently Fiona remembered him and extended her hand to him in friendliest greeting.

"I think you must give me a kiss, Roddie, for auld lang syne. Now, I'm happy. I shall think I have Garrows and the Glen at Princes Gate."

"It's a very much glorified Garrows, Fiona," answered Roddie with an expressive glance round. "And until I heard you speak, upon my word I was afraid to look at you. What have they done to you in these short weeks?"

"Nothing, I hope. Ask him what he means, Don," with a merry glance at her husband. "I do not like them to think I look different. You do not think I am changed, uncle?"

"If you are changed, my lassie, it is a bonnier and delightful change. It is meet that you should look what you are; the day of simple things is past."

"No, no, uncle, I will not let you say that. I am always telling Donald that we must guard against losing our love of simple things. It will mar the happiness of to-night if you say I have so quickly changed."

The tears were so near her eyes that they hastened to assure her that the change must exist only in their imaginations. Then they parted for a few minutes, Fiona accompanying her uncle herself to the apartments she had prepared for him with such loving care and forethought.

She was amazed to see him looking so well. His fine, tall figure seemed to have had restored to it something of its noble erectness, and there was not a trace of fatigue on his face, which had a ruddy hue on the cheek like the bloom of a winter apple,

"Oh, it is so nice to see you, uncle, and I hope you will stop a long, long time, till we can all go back to dear Garrows together."

"Faith, and I shall not be in a hurry to go, I think, dear lassie," said Maclean, as he looked round the spacious, comfortable room. "You have taken too much pains to make us comfortable. Perhaps you will not be getting rid of us so soon as you would like."

"That is exactly what I want," she cried gleefully. "Now tell me how does the dear Glen look, and do they miss me? I'm so jealous in case they put any one in my place."

Maclean mournfully and significantly shook his head.

"That could never be, lass. There is only one Fiona, and there never will be any other. We have tholed the last few weeks in the Glen, and that is all that can be said. But come now, tell me how it is with you? Is this the life you would like?"

"I like whatever life I have to share with Donald, uncle," she said with a faint rising blush. "He is so good to me, so tender and considerate, and oh! I am so proud of him. He will be the pride of the whole Glen soon, he speaks so well, and every one thinks him so clever."

"It is well; I am content. It is what I would have wished, Fiona," said the old man. "And after I have bidden a space with you in your own home, and satisfied myself that all is well and as it should be with you, I will to my own house of Garrows, and then I am ready when the Lord calls."

"Oh, uncle, you must not speak like that. Besides, why should you? You look twenty years younger than you did when Donald came home. I hope you are going to live other twenty years; we can't spare

you. Now, you need not trouble to dress for our dinner to-night ; we shall just be alone, a little family as we used to be at Garrows when Roddie would drop in from his round. How well Roddie looks, uncle, and how nice it is to have him here. He must stay with us a long time."

"Not long, Fiona ; we must not press him, for his father is sair failed, and it was only to take care of me he let the lad come, which I think was fell good of him."

"So do I. Well, we hope he will be able to stay a week at least. Nobody is ever ill in the Glen in June, anyhow, so the old doctor will have quite an easy time of it."

So saying she flitted away to see that everything was in readiness for the dainty, cosy meal which she had caused to be spread in one of the smaller rooms, anxious to keep up the idea of simple family life, and also to make everything look as much as possible like the old house at home.

Seldom had there been such a merry, happy meal in that house, certainly not in the lifetime of the ne'er-do-weel who had run through his patrimony and crowned his misdeeds by the selling of his family's town house.

Fiona at the head of the table, her face radiant, her eyes now smiling and now moist and tender, was the magnet which drew all their eyes, the light of all hearts. Donald himself was rather quiet. Many times he was oppressed by the completeness of his own happiness, it seemed so perfect and flawless a thing that it would not bear analysis.

Roddie saw how it was with him, and his honest heart, free from every thought of self, rejoiced in the joy which he only witnessed but could not share. Maclean was in great form ; he seemed to have stood the journey

without a trace of fatigue, and the generous wine, though he partook of it sparingly, seemed to increase the exhilaration of spirits which was the outcome of pure joy at the sight of Fiona.

"Now, I have to go back to the House," said Donald, when they had lingered as long as they dared over dessert. "Roddie, you'd like to come with me, wouldn't you?"

"So should I," said Maclean quickly. "But, perhaps, it would be wise for me not to do too much after my journey."

"I should rather think so," said Roddie a trifle drily. "Do you hear that, Fiona? He wants to go down to the House, and it near ten o'clock. We shall have him making a speech himself. Why didn't you stand for the Glen yourself? I wonder that some of us did not think of that."

Maclean laughed. "I'm not so very old. There are older men in Parliament. I'm only seventy-eight."

"And young for your years," answered Fiona. "Don't you think he looks younger, Donald?"

"Indeed I do, dearest," answered Donald, with a look which was full of understanding sympathy.

"Well, I will wait up till you come back, anyhow," said the old man stoutly.

"Indeed you won't," said Roddie. "If you threaten to do any such thing I will stop in myself and put you to bed. Fine jinks these for a man who is accustomed to go to his bed peaceably at nine o'clock. It is the dissipation of London life taking its effect on him already. You have a lot to answer for already," said Roddie with a comical glance at Donald and Fiona.

"We shall not be home till the small hours," answered Donald. "You're not going out anywhere this evening, are you, Fiona?"

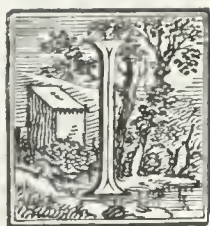
"No, I did not make any engagements for to-night at all."

"Dear me," said the old man, "do you keep such untimely hours, too, Fiona? Well, well, it's a wonder to see you looking so fresh and bonnie. I suppose you take your sleep in the morning, as nobody can burn the candle at both ends?"



CHAPTER XXXVII.

RODDIE IN DANGER.



It was a constant source of wonder and delight to watch Maclean during the next few days; not only had he obtained a new lease of strength, but there appeared to have returned to him something of his old buoyant freshness and mental vigour. His keen and intelligent interest in everything connected with Fiona's new life knew no weariness, no detail appeared to be too trifling to engage his attention, so long as it gave him a better understanding of her position. Nothing entertained him more than to examine the pile of invitation cards which daily lay upon her table, and he was never tired of hearing what she was going to do, what invitations she had accepted, and what she was going to wear.

"I think he'd succeed as editor of a fashionable intelligence column, don't you, Fiona?" said Roddie teasingly one morning. "I say, Laird, what will you pay me not to tell of your ongauns in the Glen?"

"What ongauns?" said Maclean, his own eye twinkling with a responsive, merry gleam. "It was a wise man who said that when in Rome you must do as the Romans do."

"Oh yes, that's all very fine," said Roddie; "but what

I'm amazed at is how you stand it. How many engagements has he to-day, Fiona ? ”

“ Hush, be quiet, Roddie, don't tease,” said Fiona. “ Never mind him, uncle, let him talk. He's never a moment in the house, and he is found a deal oftener than he ought to be at Mrs. Leyden's.”

“ Well, I don't wonder at that,” said Maclean, “ for she's a fine woman, a by-ordinary woman I would call her, and I like her husband no that ill either.”

“ She is greatly pleased anyhow that you have promised to go to her reception to-night, and you must be very quiet all day, uncle. I don't think you should go out at all this morning, and I will take you for a little drive this afternoon before dinner.”

“ Toots, I'm not a bairn or a delicate man,” said the Laird, giving himself a good stout blow on the chest. “ I believe it's your fault, Roddie (yours and your father's), having coddled me up all these years. I had to come to London to find there was nothing the matter with me.”

“ There's gratitude for you,” said Roddie. “ Just wait till the snow lies four feet on Craighban and I have to plough through the drifts to get at you so that there may be peace in the house. Maybe I'll be the one to cast up then.”

So they talked merrily, and out of the lightness of their hearts ; happy together during that brief and exquisite time with no common happiness. More than once Maclean had been in the House, and had heard Donald make his maiden speech—a contribution to the land question which created a good deal of remark, and which was variously discussed in the newspapers next day. It would be hard to tell in which Maclean took the greater pride. Fiona was his dearest, his joy in her was a very peculiar and precious thing ; but

something of the father's proud spirit stirred in him when he saw the heir to his name and race standing before the representatives of his country delivering himself in modest, manly tones, and yet giving forth no uncertain sound concerning the greatest and most burning question of the hour.

Mrs. Leyden had been constant and assiduous in her attention to the guests of the Orde-Macleans. Roddie had indeed spent a good deal more of his time in the mansion at Park Lane, and also at various out-door functions in the company of the Leydens, than Donald and Fiona approved.

They feared that Adela was the attraction, and if so, what more certain than disappointment and heart-ache awaited the faithful Roddie ; for how could the daughter of an African millionaire mate with a poor Highland doctor, whose income even at the maximum never exceeded the three figures ?

He had intended to limit his stay strictly to a week, but this was now the ninth day and there was no talk of his going. He ostensibly remained for the great evening party Mrs. Leyden was giving in honour of Donald and Fiona, and which was to take place that very night.

"Where are you going this morning, Roddie ?" said Fiona, meeting him on the stairs as she went up from breakfast.

"I'm going to the New Gallery with Miss Leyden," he answered, and something in Fiona's eyes caused his colour to rise slightly.

"Alone with her, do you mean ?"

"I don't know. Perhaps Mrs. Leyden will be there also ; but what if I did go alone with her, Fiona, would there be any harm in that ?"

He asked the question with a certain dash of defiance which showed Fiona that her fears were not altogether groundless.

"Oh, there is no harm, of course," she answered lightly. "Is it wise, Roddie? Donald and I were only talking of it last night. She is a very sweet, dear girl, but have you considered well what you are doing?"

"I'm not doing anything," said Roddie quickly, "except trying to have a good time while I am here. Goodness knows I'll be soon enough back at the old grind."

"Well, so long as you don't get hurt yourself, Roddie," she said with a significant smile. "It is only that we're afraid of."

"You needn't be. I'm pretty thick-headed, but there are some things I can see through. You can trust me not to make an absolute fool of myself, Fiona. Yes, I like her, I'm not going to pretend that I don't, but I'll take jolly good care that she doesn't know it. Heavens! don't I know how great is the gulf fixed between us!"

And without giving Fiona a chance to say more he took himself off. She sighed as she went upstairs to her own room. Other things being equal, she could not imagine a couple more suited to each other than Roddie MacAlister and Adela Leyden; and yet what prospects had poor Roddie? None, absolutely none. Well did she know the struggle it was to make ends meet in the old white house standing solitary on the Brig of Garrows. There were six boys and girls younger than Roddie yet to be launched in life, and at no time, even in its most successful years, had the practice reached a thousand pounds. She could almost have regretted the chain of events which had brought

Roddie and Adela together, and she felt somewhat inclined to blame Mrs. Leyden, to whom she had made no secret of the young doctor's position and prospects. But it was impossible she could forbid them to meet. She could only hope that the episode would be ended with Roddie's visit to London, and that no one would be seriously hurt.

Roddie whistled as he crossed the road from Princes Gate to the Park, and continued whistling in an undertone as he walked along under the spreading trees to Park Lane. This betrayed a certain nervousness and uneasiness of mind, and indicated that his feelings required some vent. But his spirits rose, as they invariably did, as he went up the wide steps before the pillared doorway. The door was open, the house being invaded by an army of workmen perfecting the elaborate arrangements for the great evening *fête*. He was some little time standing in the hall before he could get anybody to take a message for him, and then he was ushered into the morning-room, where Mrs. Leyden was busy writing a few notes. She was not dressed in out-door garb, although Roddie was late for his appointment. He therefore surmised that he was to escort Adela alone, and the idea was far from distasteful to him.

"Good-morning, Doctor," said Mrs. Leyden, scarcely turning her head. "I'm so worried, everything happens at once. Here is my governess seriously ill this morning. I am just going to despatch a groom for Dr. Westcott, but do you know I rather think she would like to see you. Do you mind going up?"

"I don't mind at all," said Roddie frankly. "I have never seen her yet, although I have been here so often."

"No. She was extremely anxious to see you before you came, but after she heard that you had actually

come she seemed to fight shy of the idea. She has been very poorly, and this morning it is quite evident that she is seriously ill."

"It's rather awkward for you, isn't it? Hasn't she any friends you could send her to?"

"No. She talked of having friends in England when I engaged her in Kimberley, but I have never heard her speak of them since, and she has certainly made no attempt to seek them out. But anyhow I should not think of sending the poor thing away when she is ill. She has been a good deal of worry to me, not so much on account of her illness as the causes of it. Dr. Westcott told me she had something on her mind, and Adela is always harping on the same string. It is not a very pleasant thing to think one has in the house a woman with a past, is it?"

"No, but I shouldn't think she could have much past," said Roddie vaguely. "She looks a mere girl."

"There is a good deal more in her than one would suppose, and yet I like her, poor thing, and feel sorry for her. I'm afraid, however, that she is likely to die in my hands."

"Dear me, is she so bad as that?" asked Roddie in surprise.

"She is. Dr. Westcott told me she was in a serious condition last time I called him. But there, I must not worry you with my troubles. How are you all at Princes Gate this morning? The dear Laird, is he not a treat? I hope he is quite well to-day. I think if he were to fail me to-night it would be the last straw."

"Oh, he won't fail you, I can assure you of that," said Roddie with a comical smile. "He's as excited over it as a girl over her first party."

"I don't wonder at it," said Mrs. Leyden. "And it is a great distinction for me, is it not, to have at my party one who has not been in a London drawing-room since the Coronation year? I feel quite proud of it."

"So does he," laughed Roddie.

"Well, where is it you are bound for this morning? The New Gallery. I forgot. Well, you'll excuse me? I'm too busy to think of going out this morning. I think Adela is almost ready, but I will send and see. Will you come up now and see Miss Marx?"

"Yes," said Roddie, but without enthusiasm. The sympathy he had been inclined to extend to the governess on board the *Dunvegan Castle* had somewhat waned, other and more engrossing interests having taken its place.

No fault could be found with the kind attention bestowed upon every dependent, well or ill, in the Leyden household.

The room occupied by the governess was a large and spacious chamber on one of the upper floors, with two long windows looking out upon the Park, where the trees were clothed in their most exquisite summer beauty. She was in bed, too ill indeed even to make an effort to rise. Her face flushed at the opening of the door when she saw who entered.

"Dr. MacAlister has come to see you, my dear," said Mrs. Leyden, in the habitually gentle tone in which she spoke to the ailing girl. "I did not ask your leave, because I thought probably you would be pleased to see him without announcement. Perhaps you would like to speak to him for a few minutes alone. I will just see if Adela is ready or not."

So with a nod she disappeared and closed the door.



CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A THUNDERBOLT.

“ ‘M sorry to see you so ill,” said Roddie, shocked at the change in her appearance. A hectic flush burned in her cheek, her eyes, always large and brilliant, seemed now to shine with an unearthly light. She was lovely indeed, but it was with that strange and fragile loveliness which hovers near the grave.

“Yes, I’m very ill. I shall not recover, I know, though I may get over this. It is only a question of time.”

Roddie stood gravely by the bed, looking down upon her in silence which was yet full of speech.

“I should be glad if you could tell me exactly how long I have to live?” she said presently.

“That no man, even the most skilled, can say,” Roddie answered. “The question is, do you wish to live?”

“Ah, that is it. Sometimes I do and sometimes I don’t. I’m of no use to any human being. Who would care though the poor governess died to-morrow?”

“Hush,” Roddie interrupted sternly. “You need not be ungrateful even if you do feel ill. If you have

any experience of life at all, you must know as well as I that there are many daughters not cherished and cared for as you are in this house."

"I grant it," she answered calmly; "but at the same time I know myself to be suspected and sometimes watched. They think I am not what I seem. Have you seen much of Mr. Leyden's eldest daughter? She has the eyes of a hawk."

"I need not stay here," said Roddie coldly, "to hear adverse criticism of the inmates of this house. There seems to be nothing I can do for you."

"Yes there is," she said eagerly. "I wish you would just take a little more interest in my case, and tell me if you can whether it is really serious, and if so, how long I have to live."

"I should require to make an examination of your heart and lungs, and that I have not time to do this morning, but I can come in on my way back if you really wish an opinion; but I rather think Mrs. Leyden has sent for the physician who saw you before."

"I won't see him," she answered calmly, "but I will see you if you will please come back. I suppose you are coming to the party here to-night?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Well, you won't mind sparing ten minutes to come up to my room? Doctors are accustomed to that kind of self-sacrifice."

"I shall probably come in on my way back from the Picture Gallery we are going to this morning," Roddie answered. "So I will bid you good-morning just now."

"Good-morning. I don't think you are so kind as you were on board ship, or is it that they have imbued you with some of their distrust of me?"

Roddie made no answer, but walked out of the room. He was conscious of an odd sense of dislike and aversion to her, and it was no small relief to him to find himself presently in the company of Adela Leyden, who was bright and wholesome and practical, and untroubled by any morbid habit of introspection. She simply accepted life as it came, prizing the good things with which she was so lavishly surrounded; yet there were many who, finding themselves in Adela Leyden's position, having to walk behind a young and handsome step-mother, would have found plenty of occasion for grumbling and discontent.

"You have been up to see Miss Marx, mamma tells me," she said, as they went down the steps together. "She looks dreadfully ill, don't you think? And isn't she a most depressing person? I really think it is very bad for the children to have her here, don't you?"

"I should think so, if she is allowed to see much of them," said Roddie frankly.

"But you see it is so very difficult to know what to do with her," said Adela, with rather a perplexed look on her kind face. "You can't turn away a person from the house simply because she happens to be ill, especially if she has no friends. I used to like her very much when she came first, but latterly she seems to have got so bitter and morbid. I suppose it is her illness, poor thing," she added, with a half sigh, "and one must not be uncharitable."

"I don't think that you could possibly be that, Miss Leyden," said Roddie honestly. "I told her quite plainly just before I came down that she ought to be extremely grateful to you all."

"I don't think she is, really," said Adela, "and she accepts everything as a matter of course, and that

makes me think she has been brought up very differently. It used to interest me rather trying to think out the mystery of her life, but I don't think I feel the same interest now."

"Don't let's speak about her," said Roddie with a slight touch of impatience. "She is not particularly interesting, and there are lots of other things we might talk of with advantage. I had a letter from my father this morning."

"Oh, had you, and what does he say?" asked Adela with quick interest. "I hope he is not wishing you to go home."

"He doesn't say, but he is very busy, and I know I ought not to stay much longer, especially after the long holiday I had in the winter. I think I really must go the day after to-morrow at the latest."

"Must you?" Adela turned her head away and seemed to be watching with interest the flight of a bird across the blue. "That is very soon. It seems hardly worth coming to London for."

"I only came as a physician, you know, to look after Maclean, and now he is in safe hands and perfectly well I have no shadow of excuse for remaining."

"So you will go back to the Glen and remain there all the summer, I suppose?"

"Yes, and all the winter, too."

"Mrs. Orde-Maclean has kindly invited us to Garrows at the end of the season. Papa and mamma and I are going back with them at the end of July or the beginning of August. I shall see you then."

"You will enjoy staying at Garrows," said Roddie, but there was a touch of sadness in his voice.

"I'm sure I shall. To hear Mrs. Maclean speak there is no other place like it in the world. Don't you feel like that about your Glen?"

"I once did, but I doubt I am spoilt for the Glen, now," said Roddie.

"But why?" she asked, turning her bright face to his. "What has happened to spoil your affection for the Glen? I don't like to hear you say that."

"Oh, my affection isn't spoilt; I like the old place as well as ever I did," said Roddie, quick to make amends. "What I meant to say was I had got a glimpse of another kind of life, and I question if I shall be able to settle down as content as I was before."

"Oh yes, you will," said Adela confidently. "Well, are we going to the New Gallery or are we not, because we're not taking the right way?"

"I'd much rather stop out of doors," said Roddie quickly.

"So would I," admitted Adela with a frank smile, "and if we both feel like that why should we go?"

"But what will Mrs. Leyden say to us?"

"Oh, mamma won't mind. Let's go on the top of a 'bus out to Richmond; we could be back before lunch."

"But what will Mrs. Leyden say?" pleaded Roddie again; and his heart beat at the thought.

"Oh, she won't say anything. Mamma is very good that way; she is not very strait-laced. You see we are not really English, but colonial, and that makes a lot of difference. Of course if we meet people, as we certainly shall do, they will be horrified; but I rather think that on the whole I should enjoy horrifying them."

"All right," said Roddie with the air of one who considered the question settled. "All I care for in the world at this moment is to be beside you."

It was an unwise speech and it slipped out unawares. Adela did not appear to notice it, but there was a sweet flush on her cheeks and a rare light in her eyes which

had not been there when she left the house. So they got on the top of the humble omnibus as happy as two children out for the day, without a shadow or a care to come between them.

They talked of many things as they rode together that sunny June morning, Roddie confiding to her every detail of his position and prospects, she listening sympathetically, proud to be so trusted, and conscious, too, that there was a kind of personal element in the confidence, which certainly made it no less sweet. They arrived back at Park Lane when lunch was in progress.

"Well, you have had a long morning at the pictures," was Mrs. Leyden's greeting. "Surely you will be able to give us a full and detailed criticism of them all."

"Oh, mamma, we have never been there at all," cried Adela. "I hope you won't be very cross, and don't scold Dr. MacAlister, for it was all my fault. We have been to Richmond on the top of an omnibus."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Leyden significantly. "Do you hear where this couple have been, papa?" she said to her husband. "It is time you were beginning to exercise a little authority in this quarter."

"Why shouldn't they go to Richmond if they've a mind to?" asked Mr. Leyden lazily. "Nice old place, isn't it, Doctor? Did you go to the top of Richmond Hill, where they say you get the finest view in England?"

"No, we didn't. We just turned round again and came back. It was a great deal more entertaining than going to see the pictures."

"I'm glad you are honest enough to admit that," said Mr. Leyden. "There's lots of stuff talked about pictures by people who don't know anything about them. I'm sure this girl of mine will miss you when you go away; but I hope you are not going to be in a hurry."

"I must go the day after to-morrow," said Roddie. "I have just been telling Miss Leyden that this sort of lotus-eating existence is very bad for a fellow who has to go home and work hard for his living."

"Lotus-eating existence, do you call it?" said the millionaire quizzically. "Well, speaking for myself, I work a deal harder during the London season than I ever did when I was working among the diamond dust at Kimberley, and if my wife is honest she'll say the same thing."

"Oh, I admit it's hard work," said Mrs. Leyden, "but we enjoy it all the same. Well, I've had a message back from Dr. Westcott's house," she said, turning to Roddie. "He is out of town and will not be back till Monday. What did you think of Miss Marx this morning?"

"She is certainly ill," said Roddie; "but as Dr. Westcott can't come I'll go up and see her again if you like, and give you the best professional opinion in my power."

"Thank you, I shall be very much obliged if you will," said Mrs. Leyden with an appreciative smile. "I shall join you presently."

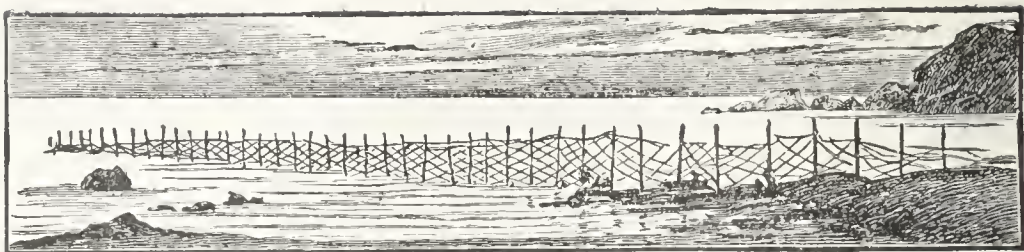
Then they talked of other and more interesting themes till lunch was over. Immediately after it Roddie went upstairs and knocked lightly at the door and then walked in. Miss Marx was lying as he had left her, with an untouched luncheon tray on the table beside the bed.

"I've come back as I promised," he said courteously. "Haven't you been able to take any dinner?"

"No, I can't eat anything," she answered peevishly. "I wish you'd ring and tell them to take it away."

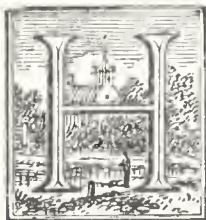
"I can lift the table back; that will do in the mean-

time," he said quietly, and proceeded to put the thought into execution. As he lifted the table he brushed against the coverlet and turned it slightly back. A photograph lay beneath it, and his eye fell upon it. It was a full-length figure of a man wearing the picturesque costume of a veldt rider, but it was the face which riveted the eye of Roddie MacAlister and caused his heart almost to stop beating. For it was the face of his friend and comrade, Donald Orde, and in a moment the awful truth seemed to come home to him, and he knew that the woman before him was none other than Julie Van Ruysler, Donald's former wife.



CHAPTER XXXIX.

WHAT TO DO ?



HE turned to her with blanched face, fiercely grasping the photograph in his hand.

“My God, what does this mean?” he cried hoarsely. “Why do you keep this unless——”

“Unless I had sufficient cause,” she said with a still, cold smile. “I see you have guessed the truth. That is the photograph of my husband.”

“Then you are Julie Van Ruysler!” he said, making a tremendous effort to steady his voice.

“I was. My rightful designation is Mrs. Donald Orde.” And though the look in Roddie’s eyes might have slain her, she did not shrink or quail.

“Woman,” he cried, in a voice of thunder, “do you know what you have done? You have slain the sweetest woman God ever made. Do you know that when she learns that you are alive she will die herself of a broken heart, and it would be the greatest mercy those who love her could wish her?”

“Every one thinks of her,” cried Julie, in a burst of passion. “Have I less capacity for loving? Am I less a woman than she? She has come between me

and my happiness for many years. She broke my heart first ; it is her turn to suffer now."

"And she will suffer," said Roddie from between his clenched teeth. "Had you no pity? I can hardly believe, looking at you, that you could plan a scheme of revenge so diabolical."

"I am glad you will give me credit for that at least," she said drily. "I made no plan, I simply obeyed the natural instinct of a woman scorned, to leave the place where she was no longer welcome. How could I tell that he would so quickly forget me and marry her? And yet I might have known."

Roddie, scarcely yet able to grasp the full and awful significance of what he had heard, and feeling only an overwhelming desire to escape from the sight of the woman who had wrought such havoc in the lives of those dearest to him, turned round suddenly and walked out of the room. Just outside the door he met Mrs. Leyden coming to hear what he had to say about the governess. Scarcely conscious of what he was doing, he took her by the arm with a grip which hurt.

"Don't go in there; take me somewhere where we can talk. An awful thing has happened," he said hoarsely.

Bewildered and alarmed, Mrs. Leyden immediately stepped across the corridor to the schoolroom, which was empty, the children having gone for their afternoon stroll in the Park.

"What can you mean, Doctor?" she asked, her own face paling slightly at the rigid whiteness of his.

"Do you know who she is in the next room, Mrs. Leyden? None other than Julie Van Ruysler, who was Donald Orde's former wife."

Mrs. Leyden's eyes slowly dilated, and her heart seemed to stand still.

"Oh, impossible, Dr. MacAlister. God forbid that anything so terrible should be true."

"It is true, I tell you. Why did nobody suspect it?" he cried fiercely. "You might have done so. Your natural woman's wit might have discovered her secret long ago."

She stared at him helplessly, too much horrified even to resent his reproaches, which indeed were natural enough. As they stood together in that strained silence the awful consequences of the revelation just made to them seemed to come home more and more to their aching hearts. Mrs. Leyden indeed felt inclined to blame herself. A thousand unconsidered trifles now rose up before her memory, trifles which might have given her some guide to the truth. In the full light of knowledge everything seems plain, and we marvel many times at our own blindness.

"It is an awful thing, Dr. MacAlister," she said in a trembling, uncertain voice, "for her—Fiona, I mean; far, far worse than death."

"It is of her, and her only, I am thinking," cried Roddie, in tones of concentrated anguish. "Could you believe that there could exist a woman so heartless and so cruel to another?"

"Is there nothing we can do to avert or mitigate this calamity?" cried Mrs. Leyden, wringing her hands; robbed for the moment of her usual self-possession and quick perception of the best to be done. "To think I have harboured her in this house, allowing her to be with my children, and treating her almost as if she were my own. Do you mean to say that it was deliberately planned all through, that it has been the work of a jealous woman?"

"Oh, what does it matter?" cried Roddie, out of the

depths of his miserable heart. "What matters the motive to us. It is the fact we cannot get away from, the awful fact. Who is to tell Fiona?"

Mrs. Leyden shook her head. It was indeed a task from which the bravest might have shrunk.

"She is so happy," she cried, and the tears rained down her cheeks. "We have been so proud of them: this will kill her."

"It will crush the life out of her. And think of poor old Maclean and his pride in them both, and Donald, too—we must not blame him too much, poor fellow. And yet it is Fiona, sweetest and most innocent of all, who will be overtaken by the chief desolation and despair."

"It is a thing beyond all human aid, Doctor," said Mrs. Leyden. "But it is possible that our extremity may be God's opportunity. He may not in His mercy prolong that unhappy creature's life."

"But we cannot wait for that," cried Roddie fiercely. "Fiona must be told at once; it is what she would wish although it would kill her. She has no right to her position: she has never been his wife except in name. My God, is it Fiona we are talking of? Forgive me, Mrs. Leyden, but I am maddened, unmanned—I don't know what I am saying. And who—who is to tell her?" That was the burden of his cry.

"If no one else will, I must," said Mrs. Leyden. "I daresay strength will be given me for the task. I feel myself in some measure to blame, although how could I tell that anything so terrible could ever happen? The idea that Donald Orde's former wife could be alive never occurred to me, even in imagination."

"He was afraid of it at one time—that was why we took our journey last year. I stood with him on the bank of the lake where we thought she had ended her

useless and miserable life, and I did my best to reassure him. Heavens! when I think how I tried in every possible way to lessen and banish his fears, and to hurry on his marriage with Fiona! Oh, we have all been to blame, but what does it matter, I say? It does not make one iota of difference to the great, dreary, appalling fact that his first wife is alive, and that Fiona has never been his wife at all."

"He is to be pitied," said Mrs. Leyden, her eyes luminous with the great compassion of her soul. "Just think what it will be to him; how he adores her, how dear every hair upon her head is to him! Lesser woes have driven many men to despair and self destruction."

"Ah, but Donald is made of better stuff than that," said Roddie quickly. "He may be depended upon to make the best of whatever trouble overtakes him. But there is no best in this; it is dreary, unutterable, and complete despair."

"Well, then, what is the first step to be taken?" said Mrs. Leyden, her natural practical turn of mind asserting itself. "What is to be done with the creature in the next room? She must remain here, I suppose. I cannot turn her out."

"No, let her be. Let her die there in peace, if need be. No weak revenge we can wreak on her will atone in the smallest degree for her awful sin. What about to-night? Do you think that you and I could wear a mask for four-and-twenty hours?"

"If we could it might be well," she said. "You see this reception to-night has been much talked of. The whole world knows in whose honour it is given, and the fact that one of our royal princes is coming makes it impossible that it can be put off. It may be as well, in consideration of what may happen in the future, that

we should give society nothing whatever to talk about in the meantime."

"I think you are right," said Roddie gloomily. "We had better keep the thing secret if we can—at least until to-night is over."

"I can, but I am not so sure of you—it is written in your face. You must feign illness or you will betray yourself as certain as you live."

"Perhaps not; I'll school myself. I'll go away all the afternoon out into the country and try and think it out. I'll come back to Princes Gate only in time to dress, and thus see as little of Donald and Fiona as possible; but I think that after the evening is over they must be told. It is what Fiona herself would wish. God help her! God help her!" and then poor Roddie, totally overcome, covered his face with his hands, and a great sob shook him like the wind of winter in the trees. Mrs. Leyden looked on with heaving breast and eyes wet with bitter tears. She had had a wide and varied experience of life and had seen the shipwreck of many a fair bark, but never had she known or heard of anything so hopeless and so terrible. She could only cry passionately, if mutely, to Heaven to intervene and shed some light upon this path of darkness and despair.



CHAPTER XL.

COMING TO A CRISIS.



WHEN Roddie MacAlister left the house in Park Lane he took a hansom to Liverpool Street and went from thence to Chingford, spending the rest of the afternoon in Epping Forest. At seven o'clock he returned to town, weary and dispirited, more conscious than when he went away of the futility of his efforts to bring order out of the chaos of his thoughts. For think and scheme as he might, it was impossible to get away from the terrible fact that Fiona's life was ruined, that she was not and never had been wife to Donald Orde. How to meet her, how to preserve an ordinary demeanour when his heart was frozen with this awful thought, was the problem for which he could find no answer.

Dinner was in progress when he reached the house in Prince's Gate, and many had been their conjectures concerning his disappearance. They were not at all alarmed, however, knowing that he was well fitted to look after himself.

"Is that Dr. MacAlister?" Donald asked the butler, when the hall bell rang.

"Yes, sir."

"Just ask him to come in as he is, will you? Or stay, I will go out to him."

So saying Donald stepped out into the hall.

"Well, you incorrigible truant, what do you mean by this? Do you know that it is a quarter to eight, and we were beginning to get seriously alarmed. Where have you been?"

"I've been—oh, out in the country," said Roddie vaguely. "Ask Mrs. Maclean to excuse me."

"From dinner, do you mean?" asked Donald, puzzled by the evident confusedness of Roddie's look and manner. "Perhaps you have dined?"

"No, I don't want any, thank you. Just let me be, Don. I'll go up to my own room if you don't mind. When do we leave for Mrs. Leyden's?"

"Oh, not till ten. You've time to have a nap if you like before that. I'll tell them to send up something to you if you feel seedy."

"No thank you, I don't want anything. I'll be all right presently, Don," said Roddie, attempting to speak cheerfully, and forcing himself to meet the kindly eyes of his old friend. "Just ask Fiona to excuse me, will you? I'm awfully sorry. I'll see you later on." So saying he bounded up the stairs two or three steps at a time. Poor Roddie had schooled himself to face his friends, and all the way home had been conning in his mind the commonplace words with which he was to veil the misery of his heart, and lo! he had signally failed, and had only succeeded in convincing Donald that something serious had happened to upset him. Knowing this, he groaned miserably as he flung himself into his own room and locked the door.

"Roddie doesn't look just right, Fiona," Donald said, as he returned to his place at the table. "He doesn't

give a very satisfactory account of himself; but one thing is quite evident—he wants to be let alone.”

“Has he had any dinner?” asked Fiona sympathetically.

“I shouldn’t think so; but he says he doesn’t want any. We’ll just let him alone for a little. I daresay he’ll be all right soon.”

“It’s the heat and the late hours,” observed Maclean wisely. “It’s more than flesh and blood can stand. You’ll find that out soon. I wish you would be warned in time.”

Fiona only laughed, and asked no further question until she went upstairs to dress for Mrs. Leyden’s.

“Shall I go in and see Roddie, Donald?” she asked. “What is the matter with him, do you think?”

“I can’t be positive, but he looks pretty hard hit. Either he has proposed to Miss Leyden and been rejected, or he wants to propose to her and thinks it’s no use.”

“Oh, nonsense, Don,” said Fiona incredulously. “Did you ever know a Scotchman make such progress in a love affair in so short a time? Why, it is only nine days since he came.”

“It’s been nine days too long for him, anyhow,” was Donald’s reply. “It’s an awful pity. Don’t you think so, Fiona?”

“Yes, it is, for Roddie—and for her, too, for the matter of that,” said Fiona with a sigh. “I suppose her father would consider it impossible.”

“I should think so. Much as I like Roddie, I don’t see how any satisfactory arrangement could be come to concerning Adela Leyden, unless indeed he came here and set up a West End practice. But where would the money come from? Even if Mr. Leyden

were willing, Roddie is not the man to owe his position or his means to his father-in-law."

"It is a great pity," said Fiona regretfully, her fair face clouded as it had not been for many a day. "Don't you think that it's hard that the nicest people in the world always seem to suffer most? Roddie is such a splendid fellow, he would make anybody happy."

"That's where you are right, Fiona. But there, it's no use you worrying yourself about it. What's done can't be undone. Besides, you warned him well."

"Yes, I did; but what is the use of warning in a case like that, Don?" asked Fiona, with some archness in her smile.

By the time the carriage came to the door at ten o'clock, Roddie had managed to get into his evening clothes, and came downstairs just behind Fiona, who was regal in her bridal robes. The exquisite fabric was not more dazzlingly white than the beauty it adorned. Her only ornament was a string of pearls of large size and exquisite purity, fastened behind by one of the famous stones from the South African diamond fields. Maclean wore his full dress as the chieftain of his clan. It was many years since he had worn it before, and it seemed to stir in him some of the pride and the glory of a younger time. Roddie could not help being struck by his princely bearing, and groaned in spirit as he thought how that proud white head would be bent low in the dust over the humiliation and woe of the child he so dearly loved.

"I hope you are feeling better, Roddie," Fiona said kindly; but remembering what her husband had said, forbore to question him further; so they stepped within the carriage and were rapidly driven to their destination.

Already the rooms were filling fast. Mrs. Leyden's position in society was now so assured that her invitations were eagerly coveted. The party she was giving that night had been much talked of, and the whole company were on the *qui vive* to see the beautiful bride in whose honour it was given. She attracted a considerable amount of attention as she moved through the throng, each detail of her dress and appearance being eagerly noted, and the verdict was unanimous in declaring her the beauty of the season. Those with her came in for some share of attention also. Many asked who was the stately old gentleman with the bearing of a king and the old-fashioned courtesy of manner which belonged to a by-gone day. Many noticed that Mrs. Leyden seemed somewhat out of sorts. Hitherto she had borne her social triumph with a calmness of demeanour which many had envied. That night it was observed that she was excited and ill at ease, and even after the royal prince had arrived, signifying by his gracious manner and flattering words his pleasure at being present, her nervousness seemed to increase rather than diminish. As for Roddie MacAlister, no one paid any heed to him. He was lost in the crowd, more lonely than he had been even in the green depths of Epping Forest, and he was glad of it. Soon the darkness of an undreamed-of tragedy would obscure that brilliant scene, which seemed to him, and also to the woman who alone shared the secret with him, the veriest mockery.

The royal prince specially desired to be introduced to Mrs. Orde-Maclean in the supper-room, and afterwards brought her back to the reception-room on his arm. As they came up the wide, rich staircase, followed by the gay throng, a white despairing face looked over

the balustrade from the upper landing, and this was what she saw : a fair and stately woman with a sweet untroubled face, and serene eyes in which no shadow dwelt, apparently unmoved by the completeness of her social triumph, listening with serene unconsciousness of self to the gracious words in which the prince bade her welcome to London, and expressed the hope that she found it come up to her expectations. As they passed out of sight the bitterness of death was in the eyes of the woman who watched them, and she crept back to her own room and threw herself on the bed in a tempest of bitter weeping. So Anna, the children's maid, found her when she came in to inquire if she had everything she wanted for the night.

"Are you feeling worse, miss?" the girl asked, kindly.

"Not any worse, thank you," Miss Marx answered, doing her best to stifle her anguish and to speak calmly.

"Is there anything more I can do for you before I go downstairs, then?" Anna asked. "They'll want all the help they can get after the supper-room is empty."

"There is one thing you can do for me, Anna, if you will," said the governess, raising herself on her elbow and looking at the girl. "It is a very little thing, but if you would rather not do it, never mind."

"I will do it, of course, miss, if I can," answered Anna, with the utmost readiness.

"Well, perhaps you will wonder at my request, and, if you would rather not do it, it does not matter. There is some one in the house I should like to see—one of Mrs. Leyden's guests. You know him—Mr. Orde-Maclean."

"Yes," said Anna, "I know him."

"I saw him go downstairs not long ago," said Miss Marx, almost betraying herself in her eagerness. "He

was an old friend of my father's, and used often to visit at my old home in South Africa. I should like very much to see him just for a moment. Do you think he would come up if you were to ask him ? ”

“ He might,” answered Anna, but her look was a trifle suspicious. “ I will go down if you like and see whether I can get a word with him alone. I daresay one of the men would tell him I wished to speak with him. But would it not be better to send a message through Mrs. Leyden ? ”

“ Oh no, Anna, she might not like it. It is rather an odd request, I know, but you see I am very ill ; I know that I shall not recover, and, if you will do this little service for me, I shall always be grateful.” So saying she slipped a ring off her finger and held it out to Anna, who did not offer to take it.

“ No thank you, miss. I want no payment for such a service as this. Besides, you have always been very kind to me since you came into the house. I only wish I saw you a little better. Shall I go now ? ”

“ If you please,” she said, almost humbly ; but there was a kind of desperate look in her eyes, the look of a woman who had counted the cost.

The moment the door was closed she rose quickly and, stepping across to the long glass in the wardrobe door, took a steady and deliberate survey of herself. She wore a blue dressing-gown elaborately trimmed with lace ; the colour seemed to accentuate the ghastly pallor of her face, and the short hair curling on the blue veined brow gave to it a childish and most pathetic look. It was a sad face, from which the beauty of long ago had fled. Contrasting it with the calm and radiant loveliness of the woman she had watched upon the stairs, the hopelessness of death laid hold upon her heart.

"I have no chance even if he had loved me once. I have no chance beside her, she whispered weakly to herself. "She is like a queen ; but it is I, I, who have the power to bring that fair beauty of hers down to the very dust."

She had been prostrate the whole day, yet the fever of excitement burning in her veins, growing more intense minute by minute, seemed to have given her a strange access of strength, and she felt neither weakness nor weariness as she paced the floor of the room waiting as she hoped the coming of the man whom she had loved not wisely but too well.

It seemed a long time before she heard any footsteps on the stairs. In reality it was but a few minutes. Anna had gone down to the corridor which gave entrance to the supper-room, and had there sent in one of the men servants to ask Mr. Orde-Maclean to speak to her.

It was a strange request, but he obeyed it at once, and asked her what he could do for her.

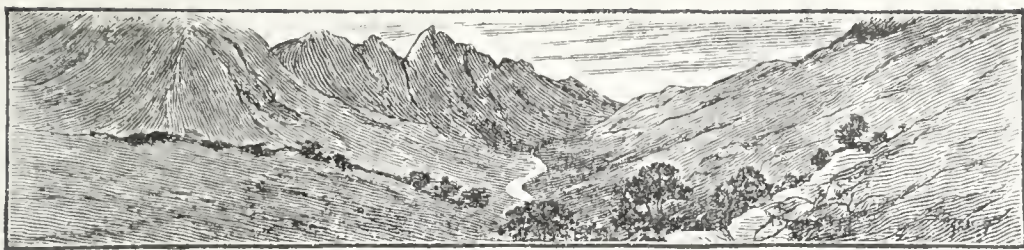
"If you will excuse me, sir," she said quickly, "I've a message from Miss Marx—our governess. Perhaps you may have heard that she is ill ; I've just been in to see whether she wanted anything for the night, and she asked me if I would come down and find you."

"Yes," said Donald, with a puzzled, inquiring look. "But what can I do for her ?"

"She wished to see you, sir. She says that you knew her father very well, and was often in her old home. She begs that you will excuse the strangeness of her request, and says that as she is so ill perhaps you would not mind going up to speak with her for a moment."

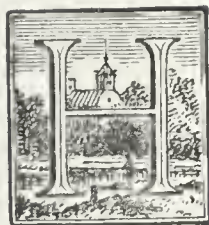
"I will go certainly—now, if you like, before going

upstairs," said Donald, his natural kindness of heart prompting him to grant a request so small, however much it might astonish and perplex him. So he followed Anna up the two flights of stairs to the door of the governess's room at which Anna knocked, and then opening it stood back for him to enter, closing it again behind her.



CHAPTER XLI.

DESPAIR.



HAPPILY, to very few in this world come such experiences, when the anguish and horror of a lifetime seem concentrated into one breathing space. As Donald Orde stepped within the door, he saw standing in the middle of the room what he believed for the moment to be the apparition of his former wife, the woman whom he had believed to be dead. She stood perfectly still, looking at him from the great dusky hollows of her eyes with a strange meaningless smile on her lips.

"Julie," he cried in a voiceless whisper. "Oh, my God, are you alive?"

"Yes," she answered, and her voice was clear and steady. "You did not expect to see me here."

He stared at her for several moments in stony silence, not realising the magnitude of the disaster which her living presence signified. He was for the time being overwhelmed with the shock of surprise the unexpected sight of her in such a place had given him.

"What does this mean?" he asked. "How comes it that you are here, masquerading as Miss Marx? Do they know in this house who you are?"

"No," she answered. "Nobody knows except Dr. MacAlister, whom I saw this morning."

The mention of Roddie's name seemed to bring before Donald's mental vision all the awful consequences following on the fact that his former wife still lived. His face grew white and rigid, his clenched hands at either side drove the finger nails into his palms. In a word he was in the throes of an agony which was more than he could bear.

He leaned helplessly up against the wall of the room, and a deep groan, wrung from the depths of his tortured heart, broke the stony stillness. This was more than the woman who still loved him, whose love for him had indeed been her own undoing—and his—could endure in silence. She had expected a storm of reproaches, an outburst of violent and bitter anger ; but to see him crushed as he undoubtedly was, crushed to the earth, was more than she could bear. She ran swiftly across the room, and fell upon her knees at his feet.

"Oh, Don, forgive me," she said. "I seem to know only now what I have done. You see my heart broke on that bitter day at Ruysfontein when you looked at me with angry eyes, and I knew that your love had gone away from me for ever, that it had really never been mine. My only desire was to creep away and die. When I got to the lake I was afraid, it looked such a dark and fearful place, so I thought, all distracted as I was, that if I buried myself away for ever out of your sight, and you believed me to be dead, it would be the same thing—that you would be left free. How could I tell that it would all end like this?"

He took his hand from before his face and allowed his eyes to meet hers, at the same time, however, he drew himself away, as if he could not bear to be near her.

"It would have been better, far better, if you had put a bullet through yourself and me, Julie," he answered in a hollow voice. "A little suffering more or less for me doesn't seem to matter much now, I have gone through so much. Had you no pity on her who had never wronged you, the woman whom I love above and beyond anything on earth, yet whom I have unwittingly destroyed?"

"I never thought about her," she answered petulantly. "How could I tell that you would marry her so soon?" In these words the real nature of the woman stood revealed. She had all her short and chequered life been accustomed to think only of herself, to act upon whatever impulse was uppermost, without the faintest regard to the consequences either to herself or others. Of what use to reason with or even to blame such a creature, in whose nature the great moral force seemed lacking? Donald Orde felt no temptation to pour out words of bitter anger or reproach on her. Such a course would not alter the fact, nor send one ray of light through the impenetrable wall of his awful despair. She stood a little apart, with her frail hands clasped before her, looking at him with a kind of wistful dread. She seemed to realise for the first time something of the evil she had wrought, and yet so fiercely did her jealousy of the other woman burn in her heart that her natural pity was crushed. She simply waited with feverish eagerness to hear what he would say or do next.

"I cannot stay here," he said at last, beginning to move towards the door. "I suppose you know that she whom I have believed to be my wife, and who is my wife in the sight of Heaven, is in this house. I have a task before me which would cause many a man to put a bullet through his brain before he essayed it.

I have to tell her that you are here, and that she is no wife of mine."

"You need not be in such haste," said Julie feverishly, clasping and unclasping her hands in her supreme nervousness. "I would not have sent for you, nor have revealed myself at all, unless I had known what your friend Dr. MacAlister told me this morning, that I should not live. Why tell her at all? I shall die soon, as soon as I possibly can."

With that she gave a mirthless laugh, which seemed to awaken a mocking echo through the room. But he made no answer, good or bad, as he passed out of her sight.

He paused in the corridor outside to wipe the dank drops of his agony from his brow. His breath came in laboured spasms; an iron band seemed to be about his heart, crushing the life out of him. Sounds of music and revelry ascended the wide staircase, and fell mockingly upon his ears. Among the revellers his darling walked a queen, the envied and admired of all, the centre and light of attraction wherever she moved. On the night of her greatest social triumph the sun would set for ever upon her precious life. He groped his way along the corridor like a man smitten with sudden blindness, hesitating, not knowing what to do next, only certain of one thing—that he must get Fiona away and tell her without delay. Suddenly the thought of Roddie occurred to him—the true friend and comrade who had never failed him through all the chequered years. It was some comfort to think that he already shared the awful secret. Well he now understood what had taken him away from London all the afternoon, and what had caused the strange shadow to fall on his happy heart. He clutched at the thought of Roddie's help and sym-

pathy as a drowning man clutches at the straw. Calling a servant who was passing, he asked him to find Dr. MacAlister, and ask him to come upstairs. Then he sat down helplessly upon a quaint carved seat in a little alcove on the landing, where he was completely hidden from view.

He had not long to wait. Dr. MacAlister was already well known to Mrs. Leyden's servants, and he had been found without difficulty. He came bounding upstairs surmising at once what had happened.

"Well, Don," he said as he drew near to his stricken friend, "I see you know all. What in God's name are we to do, old chap?"

Donald rose to his feet, and the two men looked at each other for a moment in silence. The same thought was in the minds of both, the awful task which awaited them—the telling of Fiona.

"Who is to tell her, Roddie? It will kill her. There must be some coward blood running in my veins. I've only one desire—that is to go into the Park and blow out my brains."

"No, you won't do that, old man," said Roddie, and his voice broke, through the strain upon it. "It's a terrible business, but we'll get through it somehow. Who is to tell Fiona?"

"I will," said Donald, and, as he drew himself up, his white face seemed to blanch to a more deadly hue. "We had better be getting away home now—every moment but adds to the torture I am enduring."

"Mrs. Leyden knows. She has known since I discovered it this afternoon," said Roddie. "Perhaps it would be easier if she were to tell her. A woman understands how a woman feels, you see, and it would be easier for you."

"Why should it be made easier for me?" said Donald, turning to him fiercely. "I must drink this awful cup to the bitter dregs. She shall hear it from no lips but mine. Mrs. Leyden is an outsider, kind and sympathetic, no doubt, but it is I who must tell Fiona."

Thus rebuked, Roddie held his peace.

"It is after midnight, so that I think it would not be much noticed if we left now," said Donald impatiently.

"It is impossible for you to go back to the rooms," said Roddie. "If you like I'll go down and tell Mrs. Leyden that we wish to leave. I fancy Maclean is getting a little weary."

"I shall be glad if you will spare me going back into the rooms, Roddie," said Donald. "Would it be possible for you either to take Maclean home in a hansom, or—let Fiona and me go home first, then the carriage can come back for you and him?"

"That would be better," said Roddie. "I'll go down and tell Fiona that you are not well, and would like her to go home now, and then I can see if the carriage is at the door."

"All right," said Donald, grateful for the prompt and practical help of his old friend.

Roddie went downstairs and entered the great reception-room in search of Fiona. He long remembered that brilliant scene, of which Fiona was undoubtedly the queen. She was surrounded by the honoured and distinguished guests of the night, herself the most honoured and distinguished of them all. A little natural excitement had brought an exquisite flush to her fair, pale cheek. Her eyes sparkled; her whole bearing was animated, indicating that she was not altogether insensible to the pride and triumph of the moment. Roddie bit his lip, and his eyes darkened at the thought of the

desolation which had overtaken that beautiful young life—the life beloved of all, because of its sweet unselfishness and untiring consideration for others. But it was no time for dallying with bitter and unavailing regret. It was the hour for prompt action, but Roddie felt as he moved through the gay throng like one who is leading a forlorn hope, entering upon an engagement which he knows will end in certain death.

It was some minutes before he could attract Fiona's attention, not wishing to render his interruption conspicuous. She smiled upon meeting his eye at last, and asked him if he had seen Donald anywhere, as she had missed him since supper.

"Yes, he is upstairs ; and not at all well. He has sent me to say that if you would not be much disappointed he would be glad if you would go home with him now."

Instantly a shade of alarm crossed her fair face.

"Donald ill," she said hurriedly. "I have never heard of him ailing in the slightest degree, and he seemed perfectly well half an hour ago. Where is he, Roddie? Will you take me to him?"

"In a moment. I would just like a word with Mrs. Leyden first," said Roddie, and making his way to another corner of the room, he managed to attract the attention of his hostess. She saw at once from his face that something serious had happened.

"Donald has seen Miss Marx," he whispered hurriedly, when he was within earshot. "I'm taking Fiona to him now, and they will go home together. He will tell her himself. Maclean and I will stay a little behind, you understand?"

She nodded, and sudden tears started in her eyes, her heart yearning with an unspeakable yearning over the

young creature whom such despair was about to overtake. Yet she dared not make the slightest sign, or even move to her side to utter the sympathy of which her heart was full.

When Roddie took Fiona downstairs on his arm, Donald was already waiting for her in the hall.

"What is it, dear?" Fiona cried, springing to him at once, and folding her hands on his arm. "What is this sudden illness which has overtaken you? You do look very ill, I must say. Tell me what it is."

"I shall tell you soon enough, Fiona. You will not mind coming home with me now in haste? The carriage will come back for your uncle, and Roddie, he will take care of him."

"Oh yes, that is all right. He will be quite right with Roddie," she said quickly, her face still shadowed by alarm. "Let us go home as fast as we can and get the doctor. You quite frighten me by your looks."

Roddie went out with them to the carriage door, and after they were seated wrung Donald's hand with a grip which hurt.

"God help you!" he said under his breath, but Fiona caught it.

"Something terrible has happened surely. What does Roddie mean, Donald?" she asked, the alarm deepening on her face. "What terrible thing has happened, and why did Mrs. Leyden look at me as she did when we passed out?"

"Just a moment, Fiona, until we get home, and I will tell you all."

She asked no further questions; but her heart seemed to sink. She put out her hand a little timidly and touched his. He clasped it in both his own and pressed it to his lips, then he laid his cheek upon it, and so held

it until the carriage brought them to their own door. He did not forget to send the men back for Maclean and Roddie, and then followed Fiona quickly upstairs. A strange dread oppressed her footsteps as she sought her own room, and when Donald followed her there, and closing the door, turned to her, she held out her hands with a sudden gesture of fear, her eyes wide with a vague terror in their depths.

"What is it? Tell me quick, Don. It is something very terrible I can see."

"Yes, it is, Fiona. God alone knows how you are to bear it, or how I am to tell you. My former wife, Julie Van Ruysler, is still alive!"

For years Donald Orde was haunted by the look which came into the eyes of Fiona as these words fell on her ears. She was already pale, but a strange sharpness seemed suddenly to overspread her face, and the wanness of despair pinched her lips.

"Alive," she repeated piteously. "Your wife; but I thought I was your wife. What then am I?"

Then Donald Orde clasped her almost fiercely to his stricken heart, and cried out to God to help them through this bitter moment.

"You are my wife, my darling, my precious one, in Heaven's sight, and yet, and yet——"

"And yet she has the first claim," she said, in a low still voice, and beginning to draw herself away. "Don't touch me, Don; let me be quiet a little to try and think it out."

Then she withdrew herself quite from his clasp, and, leaning against the console table between the windows, stood a moment in silence, nervously clasping and unclasping her hands, upon which the diamonds seemed to gleam in mockery.

"Tell me," she said, in a low, hurried voice, "where did you find her? Where is she now? How long have you known?"

"Not an hour," he answered hoarsely. "Have you no suspicion? She is the woman who has been governess to Mrs. Leyden's children. You have seen her yourself. I've even heard you say that you have spoken to her."

A great light seemed to dawn upon Fiona's mind.

"Now I understand the bitterness of the look she gave me that day. Poor thing, perhaps she did not think of the consequences of her sin."

Even in that moment of supreme anguish Fiona did not forget to be charitable to the woman who had wrought her such bitter woe. As he looked at her standing there, regal, yet pathetic, in her rich bridal clothes, which were no whiter than her pure soul, a great rebellion against the bitterness of fate surged in his heart.

"It's an awful thing, Donald," she said, in a still low voice. "I don't think I quite take it in. It is certain that you can't have two wives," she added with a faint, dreary smile, "and you are legally bound to her; is that not so?"

He bowed his head.

"Then all we can do is to part, Donald, and that without making any fuss. We have had one little glimpse of Paradise—perhaps we have been too happy. To-night I felt my heart uplifted with pride and joy until I could scarcely contain myself. It seemed more than is permitted to humanity. Well, it is all over."

"But, Fiona, do you realise?" he cried hoarsely, amazed at her calmness and the measured decision of her words. "Do you know what it will mean to you?"

"Yes," she said, "I know; but I have Uncle Hector left and the Glen. It will make no difference to them

in the Glen. They will only be sorry for us, and perhaps God will not ask me to live too long."

"Not one word of reproach, Fiona, for me who have wrought this terrible havoc in your life? To think that I who worship every hair of your dear head should have brought you to this. How am I to be kept from despair?"

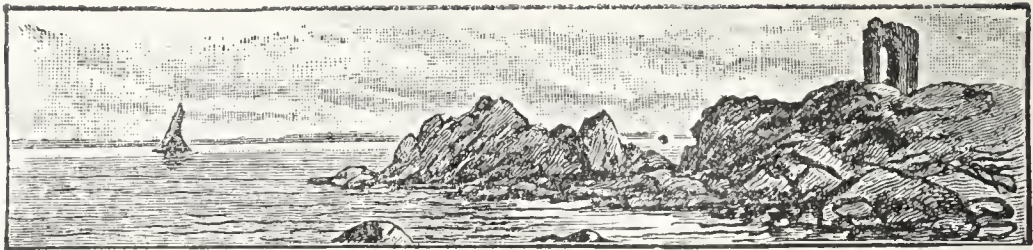
"You have work," she answered; and suddenly lifting her left hand she began to remove the rings until her finger touched the plain band which she had loved because it was the outward symbol of the bond between them. She touched it with her lips ere she took it off her finger.

"I may not wear it now," she said, "but I will not give it to you back, but keep it next my heart, where no one will see it. And now will you leave me, Don. I wish to be alone, and I don't think I can bear very much more."

His whole soul rose in revolt at the thought of leaving her to bear the burden alone, and yet he had no right to stay. She was no longer his, and the fact that she bade him go showed that she realised to the full all that the dreadful discovery involved. He dared not go near her even to give her a farewell kiss.

"I can at least watch outside your door," he said, as he passed out of the room.

When the door closed she crossed swiftly to it and turned the key, and then a shuddering sob broke from her dry white lips, and she clasped her hands over her heart to still its wild throbbing. Left alone she could give way, and after a moment she threw herself upon the bed, crushing the delicate lace of her bridal robe, and, burying her face deep in the pillows, so lay prostrate torn by the twin spirits of anguish and despair.



CHAPTER XLII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.



WHEN Roddie brought Maclean back within the hour he had acquainted him with what had happened, thus trying to save Donald a further pang. A great wrong had been done his beloved niece, and it raised for a brief space the bitter Highland anger in the heart of the old chief, and he spoke some harsh words of Donald, which Roddie understood and forgave. But when he met him face to face, and saw what this awful blow signified to him, the bitterness died out of his heart, and he only gripped him by the hand, the tears raining down his withered cheeks, his voice uttering broken words of sympathy and not of blame.

The old man went up at once to Fiona's room, but she only spoke to him through the closed door, begging to be left alone, and saying that she would be all right and able to see them all in the morning. So he crept down miserably again to the library, and the three sat talking far into the night, trying to find the best solution of the strange problem the situation offered. But all their talk was in vain. They could not get away from the sad and bitter fact that for Fiona—

the object of their love and adoration—the future was without hope.

Early in the morning, before the breakfast gong had sounded, a brougham drove up rapidly to Princes Gate, and Mrs. Leyden alighted from it. She was at once admitted, and, hearing her voice in the hall, Donald made haste downstairs to greet her.

“Good-morning,” she said hurriedly. “I need not ask how you all are. Excuse my early visit. She is very ill this morning; you know of whom I speak. I have sent for the doctor; he says she can’t live through the day. The frightful strain of the last few days, culminating in the excitement of last night, has caused a complete collapse.”

“Well,” he said sternly, “what do you wish me to do?”

“You? nothing,” she answered. “But I have a message for your wife.”

He winced ever so slightly at the word.

“Do you think she would see me?”

“I am afraid not, Mrs. Leyden,” he answered. “And if it is a message from her I forbid you to deliver it.”

“You can’t forbid me, Mr. Maclean,” answered Mrs. Leyden calmly. “You are not my master. I know very well how you are feeling, but sometimes one standing on the outside, as I do, gets all the light that is possible. Have I your permission to go upstairs to Mrs. Maclean’s room?”

He looked at her with a slight glance of wonder, surprised at her courage in coming to him on such an errand, and yet there was something in her demeanour which made it impossible to take offence.

“Oh, Mr. Maclean,” she cried suddenly, her bright eyes growing dim, “you might trust me for a few moments. I am a woman, and in some things a

woman's intuition is unerring. I think I can comfort your poor girl a little. At least let me try."

Donald signed to a passing servant to ask her to go up and tell her mistress a lady wanted to see her, but Mrs. Leyden intervened.

"She will not see me in that way. Let me go up myself." And before he could seek to detain her she was half-way upstairs.

Lizzie was hanging disconsolately about the corridor from which opened the doors of her mistress's rooms. Her surprise at seeing Mrs. Leyden at that hour in the morning was very great.

"I want to see your mistress, Lizzie," said Mrs. Leyden quickly, "most particularly. How can I get in?"

"I don't know, ma'am; something terrible seems to have happened. Do you know what it is?"

"Yes, my dear, it is a serious trouble, but it will pass. You will best prove your love and devotion to your dear mistress by saying and seeing nothing. Just tell her I wish to see her, and that I have a most particular message for her from Park Lane."

Lizzie passed through the sitting-room and knocked again at the bedroom door. This time her mistress herself unlocked it and threw it open. Lizzie could have cried out at sight of the change that night's woe had wrought; but, remembering the injunctions just given her, she made no sign, but asked if she could do anything.

"Yes; you can bring me a cup of tea now, Lizzie. I thought I heard voices outside."

"Yes, ma'am, it is Mrs. Leyden who has come to see you."

"Mrs. Leyden," repeated Fiona. "Well, she can come in, I will see her."

Lizzie flew back to the corridor, and the next moment Mrs Leyden passed through the sitting-room, and entering the bedroom closed the door. Fiona in the night had removed her satin robes, and now wore a white dressing gown which matched the hue of her cheek. Mrs. Leyden never spoke, but ran to her, and gathering the slender figure in her arms pillowed her head on her breast.

“My dear, my precious girl, I have thought of and prayed for you all night long.”

The warm words of sympathy and the close, loving clasp of the kind arms unlocked the flood gates of Fiona’s heart, and she wept. Knowing that these tears brought healing with them, Mrs. Leyden allowed them to have their vent, and spoke no further word, only gently stroked the bright head, soothing her as a loving mother might have soothed a weary child.

“I have come on a strange errand this morning, Fiona,” said Mrs. Leyden at length, when the storm had spent itself. “The woman who has brought all this sorrow is dying in my house. They fear she will not live many hours. Her dying request is that she may see you. Will you come?”

“Yes,” said Fiona, starting up, “I will come.”

“I thought you would ; it will lift you above yourself. Can I help you to dress now and take you back with me?”

“Yes,” said Fiona, and began to unfasten the flowing gown she wore.

Mrs. Leyden, with her own hands, opened the wardrobe door and took from thence a walking gown and a warm cloak. While they were thus engaged Lizzie appeared with the tea tray, and Mrs. Leyden induced Fiona to drink and to eat a morsel of toast.

"Now, Lizzie, I am going to take your mistress back to my house in Park Lane. There is some one very ill there who wishes to see her. You will say nothing to any of your fellow-servants about what has transpired."

"No, ma'am, nothing," answered Lizzie, and the look she cast upon her mistress seemed to vow eternal fealty.

In a very few minutes Fiona was dressed for her drive, and went downstairs, leaning on Mrs. Leyden's arm. Donald still lingered in the hall, and when he saw them on the stairs he sprang forward with the utmost consternation on his face.

"Where are you taking her to?" he asked. "Fiona, do you go of your own free will?"

"Yes, Donald," she answered with a faint, sweet smile. "I shall not be long, and afterwards we must talk things over. There is a great deal to say."

She gave him her hand, which he raised to his lips. Further speech was impossible to him; and when the carriage door was shut and it rolled away through the sweet morning sunshine which seemed to mock at his pain, he took a hat from the cloak-room and passed out into the street, turning his steps involuntarily towards the house in Park Lane; the brougham, of course, was there long before him.

Mrs. Leyden accompanied Fiona up to the door of the room where Donald Orde's wife lay prostrate upon her bed, waiting the last summons, and spoke only one word ere she left her.

"She has suffered also, and her suffering is keener than yours, dearest, because she has sinned."

"I shall not forget," answered Fiona, and, entering the room, closed the door.

The blinds were only half-drawn, but the subdued reflection of the glorious morning sunshine seemed to

cast a radiance over everything. She stepped swiftly across to the bed, and for a moment these two women, who had so strangely crossed each other's paths, exchanged looks in silence.

"You are good to come," said Julie at last, in a low, difficult whisper. "What are you made of?"

A great pity surged in Fiona's heart—a pity which lifted her for the moment clean above her own despair. She looked so young, and fragile, and childish to have passed through such deep and bitter waters, to have wrought so much confusion and woe in her own life and in the lives of others.

"What were you thinking of," she said gently, "to do such a terrible thing? Did no thought of the consequences ever strike you?"

"No," she answered, shaking her head. "I thought of nothing except that his love had gone from me. I was terribly, fiercely jealous of you from the first moment I heard him utter your name. I knew by the tone of his voice and the softness of his eye that you were all the world to him. But you see I loved him too."

"Yes, poor thing," said Fiona, and stretching out her kind hand she let it fall for a moment with a gentle, sympathetic touch on the blue-veined brow. Julie caught it passionately between her own, and her hot tears fell upon it.

"I don't wonder now that he loved you, and that, having once seen you, he could never care for another. Let me hear you say that you forgive me."

"I do, as Heaven is my witness," said Fiona gently. "What would it avail to keep up any bitterness against you?"

"What are you made of?" repeated Julie, in the same wondering tones. "You seem so far above every other

woman. Did you guess, I wonder, that day I met you in the hall, how I hated you in my heart because you were so beautiful and so well beloved of all ? ”

“ No,” answered Fiona, “ I did not guess. But these bitter thoughts have fallen from you now, have they not ? ”

“ Oh yes. I think I could love you, too, if I dared, but I am not good enough. Perhaps if I had known you long ago when I was little you would have taught me to be good.”

“ Hush ! ” said Fiona. “ You have not been deliberately wicked, only thoughtless. I have always said to Donald that you did not think of the consequences.”

“ I never thought of anything, only of myself and of how I loved him. When I am gone and you are happy together again, you will remember me kindly sometimes, won't you, because I loved him too ? ”

Fiona's strong, beautiful mouth trembled.

“ I am very sorry for you. You feel yourself that you will not get well ? ”

“ Oh no, I shall not get well ; I don't wish to. What use am I in the world except to curse others ? I feel sorry now that any of you have known, because it will perhaps make you sad at times.”

“ Don't think of us,” said Fiona gently, “ but tell me how do you feel at the prospect of leaving this world ? You are not afraid of the future, are you ? ”

“ No, I don't think I am afraid,” answered Julie. “ I have never troubled my head very much about religion or things of that sort, and I don't see how people can know or be certain of things as they say they are. But if God is so good and kind as we are bidden believe, He will not be hard on me, for you see He will understand all I suffered, too.”

"He will not be hard upon you," answered Fiona. "He is never hard upon any one. He has helped me through the blackness of this awful night. Is there anything I can do for you? Would you like me to stay a little beside you?"

"Oh, I should, but I must not ask it. You have been an angel to me already. There is one thing, but I am afraid to say it."

"I can guess it," answered Fiona gently. "You wish to see him."

"Oh yes," cried the dying girl, and her eyes were filled with pitiful yearning. "He spoke bitterly to me last night. If he would only say one kind word and say he has forgiven me, as you have done, I should be at peace."

"He shall come," answered Fiona. "And I am sure he will forgive you, too. I will ask him."

"Are you going, then? Would you mind giving me a kiss before you go? I am not fit, I know, for you to kiss, but it is the last time. You do forgive me for all I have done to you?"

"Yes," answered Fiona brokenly, "as I hope to be forgiven."

Then she stooped down and kissed the white, worn face, and her eyes were luminous with the light which came from within. She wiped the tears from them as she stepped out into the corridor and went swiftly downstairs. To her amazement in the hall she saw Donald himself.

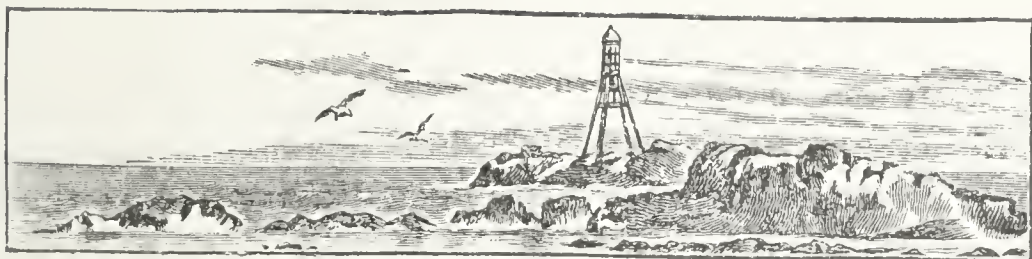
"Where have you come from?" she asked quickly. "I was just now going back to fetch you."

"Fetch me? What for?"

"Come, and I will show you." She took him by the hand and led him up the wide staircase and along

the corridor, and so to the bedside of the woman who had destroyed their happiness.

“You will forgive her, Donald,” Fiona said in a low, sweet, compelling voice, “because I ask you, and because she has loved you too.” And with that she laid his half-unwilling hand upon the white, thin fingers of the dying girl, and turning about glided swiftly from the room.



CHAPTER XLIII.

IN THE LIGHT.

“ HERE is only one course open to you, my dear. You must go abroad for a couple of months with me,” said Mrs. Leyden decidedly.

Fiona shook her head. It was the day after the death of the unhappy girl who had cast a gloom over so many lives. Since the moment she had left him at the bedside of his wife, Fiona had not seen or spoken with Donald.

“I am going back to the Glen with my uncle, Mrs. Leyden,” she answered in a low, quiet voice ; but it was sufficiently decided to let Mrs. Leyden know that she meant what she said.

Mrs. Leyden was herself quick to judge and see the fitness of things, and in a moment the great advantage of such a plan appeared to her. Perhaps in the Glen, if anywhere, it would be possible to join the broken threads of these two lives.

“Uncle and I have talked it over,” said Fiona, “and we are going back to-morrow.”

Mrs. Leyden sat still a moment looking steadfastly at the beautiful, sad face of the woman whom in these

few short weeks she had learned to love so dearly, and many deep thoughts were in her heart. There were some things which must be said to Fiona, and as there seemed no one else to perform the task she was ready. Indeed, Cicely Leyden had drawn very near to all in that stricken house during the last forty-eight hours.

"Of course it is necessary," she said calmly, "at least it would be better for you and Mr. Orde-Maclean to be parted for a few weeks, but you will not make the separation too long, Fiona, for obvious reasons."

Fiona lifted her heavy eyes and fixed them full on her friend's face.

"I feel as if we were parted for ever, Mrs. Leyden, as if nothing would bridge the gulf between us."

"Oh, you must not speak like that, my dear," said Mrs. Leyden quickly. "You believe that I am your true friend, do you not?"

"Indeed I do," said Fiona with quick gratitude. "Have you not proved yourself the truest and kindest of all friends during these sad hours?"

"Then you must also believe that I will only give you advice which is good and disinterested. I am a woman of the world, who has seen a great deal more than you, and who by reason of that experience am able to grasp most situations correctly. The situation now is this—you and Mr. Orde-Maclean will have to go through another marriage ceremony, of course, and it is absolutely imperative that it should not be long delayed for the sake of all concerned."

Fiona shivered slightly.

"I cannot bear it even in thought. The whole thing is unbearable. It can never be the same again."

"It is natural that you should feel so, my dear, but

that mood will pass. Listen to me. In the world in which we move there is nothing which is more enjoyed than the private tit-bits of family life. The more intimate and sacred they are the sweeter the morsel in the mouths of those who love to discuss them. You and I have often deplored the personal nature of much of society talk. It would be your desire, would it not, to keep your private and intimate concerns out of their reach ? ”

“ Oh yes,” cried Fiona, and she shivered again.

“ Well, then, dear, forgive me if I am cruel ; but it is the greatest kindness I can show you. Don’t you think that the mere fact of your suddenly quitting London in the very height of the season and going back to your old home, leaving your husband here, will be sufficiently commented on ? But we must face that. A short separation, I see, is inevitable. I shall do my best, and we must say that your health will not stand it, or else put the blame upon your uncle. Anything, anything to keep them even from surmising the truth.”

Fiona sat still answering nothing. The truth and wisdom of the words to which she listened were obvious, but she was too miserable to care at that moment whether her affairs were known or not.

“ You will take my advice, will you not, my dear, and go quietly down to Garrows ? We are not to have a long season, people say ; it will be practically over by the middle of July. That is six weeks hence. In a month you will allow Mr. Orde-Maclean to come down and fetch you back for the last fortnight of the season. That will effectually close people’s mouths, and in the meantime I shall fill up the breach as best I can.”

"Have you spoken to Donald about this?" asked Fiona at length.

"No. You will forgive me for having spoken so frankly to you, dearest, but somebody had to intervene to save the situation. The future has to be considered, and you will not allow any quixotic feelings to blind your common-sense view."

"I will see about it," was all Fiona would say, and Mrs. Leyden had no further talk with her.

The next day when she called in the morning, half hoping to find that Fiona had not hurried her departure until something definite was settled, she learned to her dismay that she had that morning left for Scotland with her uncle and Dr. MacAlister. She was a large-hearted woman, but she felt for the moment slightly chagrined that her intervention had borne so little fruit. She could only hope that in the solitude of Garrows Fiona would be able to face the situation more calmly and to see the wisdom of the suggested course.

As she drove through the Park again she met Donald on foot.

"I have been to your house, Mrs. Leyden," he said, as he raised his hat.

"And I have been to yours," she answered. "Jump in, I have a great deal to say to you. Just tell the man to drive slowly round the Serpentine."

He took his seat nothing loth.

"So she has gone," Mrs. Leyden said without preamble of any kind. "Was anything said before she started?"

Donald shook his head; his face wore the look of the deepest gloom.

"I have not spoken one word to her since the day

before yesterday, nor have I even seen her except at a distance."

"You must try and not feel it too much," said Mrs. Leyden. "I must say that looking at it from a woman's point of view her attitude is natural. Her feelings are frozen for the time being, but it will all come right. Of course you will marry again as soon as it is at all possible to arrange it."

"That would seem the best, indeed the only way out of the difficulty," said Donald. "But how to broach the matter to her?"

"I have broached it," said Mrs. Leyden frankly. "You did not suppose that I was going to stand by and see such shipwreck made of the happiness of those whom I love so much. I saw Fiona yesterday, and I laid the whole situation before her, sparing her nothing, and impressing upon her above all the absolute necessity of keeping the world in ignorance of what has happened. That, of course, is the most important point. Don't you agree with me?"

"I do indeed," said Donald frankly. "The idea of having her name bandied from mouth to mouth is hateful and intolerable. Tell me what she said."

"She did not say anything," answered Mrs. Leyden. "My suggestion to her was that she should go down to Garrows as she wished, and that in about a month you should follow her. Then you could be quietly married again. I suppose you have a family clergyman or some one who could be trusted?"

"Oh yes," said Donald quickly. "Did you say all that to Fiona?"

"I did, and then that you could bring her back for what remains of the season. Of course her sudden

flight will be very much talked of, especially when she had scored such a success."

"Do you think there is the slightest chance of her agreeing to this? Perhaps I have failed somewhat in not trying to see and speak more with her. You must understand how I feel."

"You have been wise, quite wise," answered Mrs. Leyden quickly. "In Fiona's state of mind it would have done more harm than good. I think you should leave her quite alone for a few weeks, and then go suddenly down without any announcement. I could almost predict what the end would be, and I should like to go with you if I might, although I hope you understand that I have no curious wish to pry or to intrude."

"God forbid that I should think such a thought of you, my friend," answered Donald, out of the fulness of his heart. "I shall never be able to acknowledge or repay what you have done for me and mine in our time of bitter need."

* * * * *

Fiona had been out of doors all the afternoon, and towards sundown began to descend the heathery slope of Craighban. The greater part of her solitary days was spent on the hills with only Luath for company. It was well that Garrows was so remote from the world. Only a few knew that she had returned from London with her uncle, and they were easily persuaded that her health had not been able to stand the strain of London life. Neither Maclean nor Roddie breathed a word of the truth, and the latter, carrying matters with a high hand, told everybody that Donald was so indispensable to the conduct of Parliamentary affairs that he could not be spared, and that they ought to think much of

their member, who had to make such a sacrifice in order to look after their interests. And he talked in such a lofty strain of the sensation Fiona had made, and the fearful gloom which settled down on London society when the doctor ordered her back to Garrows, that everybody was duly impressed, and no suspicion was aroused. Those in the house, however, were sometimes tempted to think something more serious than bodily weakness ailed their sweet young mistress. Her face was so sad, and all the brightness seemed to have flown from her eyes. Yet she looked in perfect health that evening as she trod lightly the green hillside of Craighbhan. Halfway down the budding heather tops were lost in the thickness of the pinewood which skirted the far end of the famous deer forest of Craighbhan.

It was a glorious summer evening, the sun setting royally behind the clear hills which the afterglow touched with that wonderful and solemn light only seen amidst such fair scenes. The faint promise of the coming glory of the heather, mingled with the living green of the pastures, made such light and shade as are only found in Highland glens. Far below the Glen smiled peacefully, the clear thread of the Garrows burn gurgling past the doors of the sheilings where peace and plenty dwelt. It was a fair scene, and its peace sank into the desolate heart of the woman who surveyed it and cast a soothing spell over her weary spirit. But only for a moment, for she was heart-sick and home-sick, weary for the touch of a vanished hand.

During all these days, which had seemed as years to her, no message had come to pierce the gloom—and the silence was more than she could bear. She leaned on the bar of the stile where only a few short months ago they had plighted their troth, and her eyes grew

heavy with a mist of tears. The faithful deerhound, dumbly conscious of her pain, crept to her side and laid his head against her hand. But suddenly he sprang back with a low growl, as the brushwood was parted by no gentle hand and a foot pressed the bracken with no uncertain tread. Fiona started in a fright, and then a great cry broke from her lips, and, forgetful of everything but that her husband stood before her in the flesh, she ran into his arms and was clasped close to his heart, and held there as a man holds his dearest treasure.

"My darling, you have not forgotten or grown cold to me," he whispered passionately. "You are still my wife?"

"Yes. Yes, Don—take me, take me—I cannot live without you. Never, never leave me again, or my heart will break."

Next morning, before noon, Mr. M'Donald drove up from the old manse of Garrows in Roddie Mac-Alister's gig, and in the drawing-room, with locked door, Donald and Fiona were married again. Not a servant in the house knew what had happened, nor did they express the slightest surprise when their master and mistress went away to London by the afternoon train. Two days later it was announced in the society papers that Mrs. Orde-Maclean, having recovered from her indisposition, had rejoined Mr. Orde-Maclean at Princes Gate for the remainder of the season. They did their best—and who shall blame them?—to keep their inner sanctuary sacred from the public view. So the tragedy of their earlier married life was never known, and has long since become a faint memory which scarcely clouds their happiness.

For it is high noon with them now, and each strives

to fill a great position, and to use high responsibilities for the glory of God and the good of humanity. Therefore they are blessed above the common, and find the life they share together a very high and noble and soul-satisfying thing.

THE END.



